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Jane spread them out, one after another, till half the shop was covered

(*see p. 26*)

RED AND BLACK

By

GRACE S. RICHMOND

Illustrated by Frances Rogers

FORT WAYNE AND ALLEN COUNTY
THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Garden City New York
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1919

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TO

"MY BEST FRIENDS"

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"You can't—see me through," she said. "You—I've no claim on you." 110

RED AND BLACK

RED AND BLACK

CHAPTER I

ACROSS THE SPACE

THEIR first sight of each other—Red and Black—was across the space which stretches between pulpit and pew. It's sometimes a wide space, and impassable; again, it's not far, and the lines of communication are always open. In this case, neither of them knew, as yet, just what the distance was.

Black—Robert McPherson Black—if you want his full name, had been a bit nervous in the vestry where he put on his gown. He had been preaching only five years, and that in a Southern country parish, when a visiting committee of impressive looking men had come to listen to him—had come again—and once more—and then had startled him with a call to the big suburban town and the fine old, ivy-grown church generally known as the "Stone Church."

"But, gentlemen," he had said, swinging about quickly in his study chair when Mr. Lockhart, the chairman of the committee, had asked him if he would consider a call—"I'm—I'm—why, I'm not good enough for you!"

The committee had smiled—it was quite a remarkable committee, and had a sense of humour. At least Samuel Lockhart had, and one other of the five who were waiting upon Mr. Black in his study after the evening service.

"Meaning virtue—or ability?" inquired the chairman, with his friendly smile.

"Both. You see—well, to put it honestly—I'm just a country boy as yet, born in Scotland and brought up in your South. I haven't had the training——"

"Very good things have come out of the country—and Scotland—and the South," Mr. John Radway had suggested. "And I believe you are a graduate of—a perfectly satisfactory college and seminary, and have built this church up from desertion to popularity——"

Well, they had had it out on those lines, and others, in the next hour, the committee falling more and more in love with its candidate—if so emotional a phrase may be used of the feelings stirred in the breasts of five middle-aged, steady-going, sensible men—as they watched the young man's face go from pale to red and back again, and heard him tell them not only what he thought he was not, but what he thought they might not be either—in so frank and winning a way that the more he wasn't sure he'd better come the surer they were he must!

In the end he came—called and accepted, after the modern methods, wholly on the judgment of the committee, for he had refused absolutely and finally to come and preach a candidating sermon. So when he emerged from the vestry door, on that first May Sunday, he faced for the first time his newly acquired congregation, and the church faced for the first time its minister-elect. Which was wholly as it should be, and the result was a tremendously large audience, on tiptoe with interest and curiosity.

Red was not in the congregation when Black first came in through the vestry door. Instead, as usual, he was racing along the road in a very muddy car, trying to make four calls in the time in which he should really have made

two, because his wife had insisted very strenuously that he should do his best to get to church on that particular morning. It seemed that she had learned that the new minister was from the South, and she, being a Southerner, naturally felt an instant sense of loyalty. It was mighty seldom that Red could ever be got to church, not so much because he didn't want to go—though he didn't, really, unless the man he was to hear was exceptionally good—as because he couldn't get around to it, not once in a blue moon —or a Sunday morning sun. And if, by strenuous exertion, he did arrive at church, there was one thing which almost invariably happened—so what was the use? The young usher for Doctor Burns' aisle always grinned when he saw him come in, because he knew perfectly that within a very short time, he, the usher, would be tiptoeing down the aisle and whispering in the ear below the heavy thatch of close-cropped, fire-red hair. And then Doctor Burns' attending church for *that* day would be over.

The chances seemed fair, however, on this particular morning, because Red did not come into church till the preliminary service was well along. He stole in while the congregation was on its feet singing a hymn, so his entrance was not conspicuous; but Black saw him, just the same. Black had already seen every man in the congregation, though he had noted individually but few of the women. He saw this big figure, stalwart yet well set up; he saw the red head—he could hardly help that—it would be a landmark in any audience. He saw also the brilliant hazel eyes, the strong yet finely cut face. To put it in a word, as Redfield Pepper Burns came into the crowded church, his personality reached out ahead of him and struck the man in the pulpit a heavy blow over the heart. Too strong a phrase? Not a bit of it. If the thing has never

happened to you, then you're not a witness, and your testimony doesn't count. But plenty of witnesses can be found.

Robert Black looked down the aisle, and instantly coveted this man for a friend. "I've got to have you," he said within himself, while the people went on singing the last stanza of a great hymn. "I've got to have you for a friend. I don't know who else may be in this parish but as long as *you're* here there'll be something worth the very best I can do. I wonder if you'll be easy to get. I —doubt it."

Now this was rather strange, for the family with whom he was staying while the manse was being put in order for the new minister had spoken warmly of Doctor Burns as the man whom they always employed, plainly showing their affection for him, and adding that half the town adored the red-headed person in question. When that red head came into church late, looking as professional as such a man can't possibly help looking, it was easy enough for Black to guess that this was Doctor Burns.

Across the space, then, they faced each other, these two, whose lives were to react so powerfully, each upon the other—and only one of them guessed it. To tell the truth, Red was more than a little weary that Sunday morning; he was not just then electrically sensitive, like the other man, to every impression—he was not that sort of man, anyhow. He had been up half the night, and his hair-trigger temper—which had inspired the nickname he had carried from boyhood—had gone off in a loud explosion within less than an hour before he appeared in the church. He was still inwardly seething slightly at the recollection, though outwardly he had returned to calm. Altogether, he was not precisely in a state of mind to gaze with favour

upon the new man in the pulpit, who struck him at once as disappointingly young. He had been told by somebody that Robert McPherson Black was thirty-five, but his first swift glance convinced him that Robert had not been strictly truthful about his age—or else had encouraged an impression that anybody with half an eye could see was a wrong one. He was quite evidently a boy—a mere boy. Burns liked boys—but not in the pulpit, attempting to take charge of his life and tell him what to do.

Therefore Red looked with an indifferent eye upon the tall figure standing to read the Scriptures, but acknowledged in his mind that the youth had a pleasing face and personality—Red liked black hair and eyes—he had married them, and had never ceased to prefer that colouring to any other. He admitted to himself that the intonations of Black's voice were surprisingly deep and manly for such a boy—and then promptly closed his mind to further impressions, and ran his hand through his red hair and breathed a heavy sigh of fatigue. Vigorous fellow though he was at forty years, it was necessary for him to get an occasional night's sleep to even things up. If it hadn't been for his wife's urging he might have been snatching forty winks this minute on a certain comfortable wide davenport at home. These Southerners—how they did hang together—and Black wasn't a real Southerner, either, having spent his boyhood in Scotland. Red could have heard the new man quite as well next Sunday—or the one after. He glanced sidewise at his wife, and his irritation faded—as it always did at the mere sight of her. How lovely she was this morning, in her quiet church attire. Bless her heart—if she wanted him there he was glad he had come. And of course it was best for the children that they see their father in church now and then. . . .

But he hoped the boy in the pulpit would not make too long a prayer—he, Red, was so deadly sleepy, he might go to sleep and disgrace Ellen. It wouldn't be the first time.

But he didn't hear the prayer—and not because he went to sleep. It was during the offertory sung by the expensive quartette (which he didn't like at all because he knew the tenor for a four flusher and the contralto for a little blonde fool, who sometimes got him up in the night for her hysterics—though he admitted she could sing), that the young usher came tiptoeing down the aisle and whispered the customary message in the ear beneath the red thatch. Dr. Redfield Pepper Burns had been in church precisely eleven minutes this time before being called out. What in thunder was the use of his coming at all? He gave an I-told-you-so look at his wife as he got up and hung his overcoat on his arm and went up the aisle again, his competent shoulders followed by the disappointed gaze of Black from the pulpit. The doors closed behind him, and the young usher exhibited his watch triumphantly to another young usher, making signs as of one who had won a bet. Eleven minutes was the shortest time since February, when on a certain remembered Sunday Burns had never got to his seat at all, but had been followed down the aisle by the usher practically on a run. Somebody had got himself smashed up by a passing trolley almost outside the door of the sanctuary. Being an usher certainly had its compensations at times.

Yes, Black was disappointed. Of course he faced a large and interested congregation, and everybody knows that a minister should not be more anxious to preach to one man than to another. Unfortunately, being quite human, he sometimes is. On this occasion, having suffered that blow

over the heart before mentioned, he had found himself suddenly peculiarly eager to speak to the red-headed doctor—from the pulpit—and convince him that he himself was not as young as he looked—and that he could be a very good friend. Red looked to him like the sort of man who needed a friend, in spite of all Black's hostess had said to him about Burns' popularity and his enormous professional practice. During those eleven minutes, through part of which Black had been at leisure to glance several times at Red, he had received the distinct impression that he was looking at a much overworked man, who needed certain things rather badly—one of which was another man who was not just a good-fellow sort of friend, but one who understood at least a little of what life meant —and what it ought to mean.

Thus thinking Black rose to make his prayer—the prayer before the sermon. His thoughts about Red had made him forget for a little that he was facing his new congregation—and that was a good thing, for it had taken away most of his nervousness. And after the prayer came the sermon—and after the sermon came a very wonderful strain of music which made Black lift his head toward the choir above him with a sense of deep gratitude that music existed and could help him in his task like that. At this time, of course, he didn't know about the "four-flusher" tenor, and the little fool of a blonde contralto who always felt most like smiling at the moment when he was preaching most earnestly. When he did know—well—in the end there were two new members of that quartette.

So this was how Black and Red met for the first time—yet did not meet. Though, after the seeing of Red across the as yet undetermined distance between pulpit and pew,

there followed a thousand other impressions, and though after the service Black met any number of interesting looking men and women who shook his hand and gave him cordial welcome, the memory he carried away with him was that of R. P. Burns, M.D., as the man he must at any cost come to know intimately.

As for Red—his impression was another story.

"Well, how did the Kid acquit himself?" he inquired, when he met his family at the customary early afternoon Sunday dinner. There was quite a group about the table, for his wife's sister, Martha Macauley, her husband, James Macauley, and their children were there. All these people had been present at the morning service.

Macauley, ever first to reply to any question addressed to a company in general, spoke jeeringly, turning his round, good-humoured face toward his host:

"Why not fee young Perkins to leave you in your pew for once, and hear for yourself? I've known you turn down plenty of calls when they took you away from home, but, come to think of it, I never knew you to refuse to cut and run from church!"

Burns frowned. "You're not such a devoted worshipper yourself, Jim, that you can act truant officer and get away with it. If you knew how I hated to move out of that pew this morning——"

"Yes, you'd got all set for one of those head-up snoozes you take when the sermon bores you. Well, let me tell you, if you'd stayed, you wouldn't have got any chance to sleep. He may be a kid—though he doesn't look so much like one when you get close—lines in his face if you notice—he may be a kid, but he's got the goods, and by George, he delivered 'em this morning all right. Sleep! I wasn't over and above wide awake myself through the

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preliminaries, but I found myself sitting up with a jerk when he let go his first bolt."

"Bolt, eh?" Burns began to eat his soup with relish. As it happened he had had no time for breakfast, and this was his first meal of the day. "Jolly, this *is* good soup!" he said. "Well!—I thought they always spoke softly when they first came, and only fired up later. Didn't he begin on the 'Dear Brethren, I'm pleased to be with you' line? I thought he looked rather conventional myself—and abominably young. I'm not fond of green salad."

"Green salad!" This was Martha Macauley, flushing and indignant. "Why, he's a *man*, Red, and a very fine one, if I'm any judge. And he can preach—oh, how he *can* preach!"

"I'm not asking any woman, Marty." Burns gave his sister-in-law a cynical little smile. "Trust any woman to fall for a handsome young preacher with black eyes and a good voice, whatever he says. To be sure, Ellen——"

"Oh, yes—you think Ellen is the only woman in the world with any sense. Well, let me tell you Len 'fell for him,' just as much as I did—only she never gives herself away, and probably won't now, if you ask her."

Burns' eyes met his wife's. "Like him, eh, Len?" he asked. "Did the black eyes—and his being a Southerner—get you, too?"

Mrs. Redfield Pepper Burns was an unusual woman. If she had not been, at this challenge, she would have answered one of two things. Either she would have said defiantly: "I certainly did like him—why shouldn't I, when Jim did—and *he's* a man! Why are you always prejudiced against ministers?" or she would have said softly: "If you had heard him, dear, I think you would

have liked him yourself." Instead she answered, as a man might—only she was not in the least like a man—"It's hard to tell how one likes any minister at first sight. It's not the first sermon, but the twentieth, that tells the story. And plenty of other things besides the preaching."

"But you certainly got a good first impression, Len?" Martha cried, at the same moment that James Macauley chuckled, "My, but that was a clever stall!"

Mrs. Burns smiled at her husband, whose hazel eyes were studying her intently. Red never ceased to wonder at the way people didn't succeed in cornering Ellen. She might find her way out with a smile alone, or with a flash of those wonderful black-lashed eyes of hers, but find her way out she always did. She found it now.

"Mr. Lockhart told me confidentially this morning that Mr. Black said he wasn't good enough for us. So at least we have been forewarned. He'll have to prove himself against his own admission."

"Wasn't good enough, eh?" growled Red Pepper, suddenly and characteristically striking fire. "Did he think we wanted a 'good one'—a saint? I don't, for one. My principal objection to him, without having heard him, is that he looks as if his mother parted his hair for him before he came, and put a clean handkerchief in his pocket. Jolly—I like 'em to look less like poets and more like red-blooded men! Not that I want 'em beefy, either. Speaking of beef—I'll have another slice. This going to church takes it out of a fellow."

Jim Macauley howled. "Going to church! Coming away, you mean. Just a look-in, for yours. As to the way you like your preachers, my private opinion is you don't like 'em at all."

"Mr. Black doesn't look like a poet, Red." It was Martha Macauley again. She and her brother-in-law seldom agreed upon any topic. "He has the jolliest twinkle in those black eyes—and his hair is so crisp with trying to curl that it doesn't stay parted well at all—it was all rumpled up before the end of his sermon. And he has a fine, healthy colour—and the nicest smile——"

Burns sighed. "Jim, suppose there was a man up for the governorship in our state, and we went around talking about his eyes and his hair and his smile! Oh, Christopher! Don't you women ever think about a man's *brains?*—what he has *in* his head—not *on* it?"

"It was you who began to talk about his looks!" Mrs Macauley pointed out triumphantly.

"Check!" called James, her husband. "She scores, Red! You did begin a lot of pretty mean personal observations about his mother parting his hair, and so forth. Shame!—it wasn't sporting of you. The preacher has brains, brother—brains, I tell you. I saw 'em myself, through his skull. And he's got a pretty little muscle, too. When he gripped my hand I felt the bones crack—and me a golf player. I don't know where he got his—but he's got it. These athletic parsons—look out for 'em. They're liable to turn the other cheek, according to instructions in the Scriptures, and then hit you a crack with a good right arm. It struck me this chap hadn't been sitting on cushions all his life. You'll outweigh him by about fifty pounds, but I'll bet he could down you in a wrestling match."

"Yes, and I'll bet you'd like to see him do it," murmured Red Pepper, becoming genial again under the influence of his second cup of very strong coffee, which was banishing his weariness like magic, as usual. "Well, you

won't right away, because we're not likely to get to that stage of intimacy for some time. Ministers and doctors meet mostly in places where each has a good chance to criticize the other's job. When I come to die I'd rather have my old friend, Max Buller, M.D., to say a prayer for me—if he knows how—than any preacher who ever came down the pike—except one, and that was a corking old bishop who was the best sport I ever met in my life. Oh, it isn't that I don't respect the profession—I do. But I want a minister to be a man as well, and I——"

"But it isn't quite fair to take it for granted that he isn't one, is it, Red?" inquired the charming woman at the other side of the table who was his wife.

James Macauley laughed. "Innocent of not being a man till he's proved guilty, eh, Red?" he suggested. "You know I really have quite a strong suspicion that this particular minister is a regular fellow. The way he looked me in the eye—well—I may be no judge of men——"

"You're not," declared his opponent, frankly. "Any chap with a cheerful grin and a plausible line of talk can put it all over you. You're too good-natured to live. Now me—I'm a natural born cynic—I see too many faces with the mask off not to be. I——"

"Yes, *you!* You're the kind of cynic who'd sit up all night with a preacher or any other man you happened to hate, and save his life, and then floor him the first time you met him afterward by telling him you hadn't any bill against him because you weren't a vet'rinary and didn't charge for treating donkeys."

"Call that a joke—or an insult?" growled Red Pepper; then laughed and switched the subject.

But next Sunday he did not see fit to get to church at all, and on the following Sunday he couldn't have

done it if he'd tried, not having a minute to breathe in for himself while fighting like a fiend to keep the breath of life in a fellow-human. And between times he caught not a sight of Robert Black, who, however, caught several sights of him. R. P. Burns was in the habit of driving with his face straight ahead, to avoid bowing every other minute to his myriad acquaintances and patients. Though Black tried very hard more than once to catch his eye when passing him close by the curb, he had a view only of the clean-cut profile, the lips usually close set, the brows drawn over the intent eyes. For Red was accustomed to think out his operative cases while on the road, and when a man is mentally making incisions, tying arteries, and blocking out the shortest cut to a cure, he has little time to be recognizing passing citizens, not to mention a preacher whom he persists in considering too much of a "kid" for his taste, in the pulpit or out of it.

But Black, as you have been told, was of Scottish blood, and a Scot bides his time. Black meant to know Red, and know him well. He was pretty sure that the way to know him was not to go and hang around his office, or to call upon his wife with Red sure to be away—as Black discovered he always was, in ordinary calling hours. He knew he couldn't go and lay his hand on Red's shoulder at a street corner and tell him he wanted to know him. In fact, neither these nor any other of the ordinary methods of bringing about an acquaintance with a man as a preliminary to a friendship seemed to him to promise well. The best he could do was to wait and watch an opportunity, and then—well—if he could somehow do something to help Red out in a crisis, or even to serve him in some really significant way without making any fuss about it, he felt that possibly the thing he desired might come about.

Meanwhile—that blow over the heart which he had received at the first sight of the big red-headed doctor continued to make itself felt. Therefore, while Black went with a will at all the new duties of his large parish, and made friends right and left—particularly with his men, because he liked men and found it easier to get on with them than with women—he did not for a day relax his watch for the time when he should send a counter blow in under the guard which he somehow felt was up against him, or forget to plan to make it a telling one when he should deliver it.

CHAPTER II

HEADLINES

"HARPS and voices!" ejaculated Robert Black, quite unconscious of the source of his poetic expletive, "how are my poor little two hundred and thirty-one books going to make any kind of a showing here?"

Small wonder that he looked dismayed. He had just caught his first sight of the dignified manse study, with its long rows of empty black walnut bookcases stretching, five shelves high, across three sides of the large room. The manse, fortunately for a bachelor, was furnished as to the main necessities of living, but it wanted all the details which go to make a home. Though the study contained a massive black walnut desk and chair, a big leather armchair, a luxurious leather couch, and a very good and ecclesiastically sombre rug upon its floor, it seemed bare enough to a man who had lately left a warm little room of nondescript furnishing but most homelike atmosphere. To tell the truth, Black was feeling something resembling a touch of homesickness which seemed to centre in an old high-backed wooden rocking-chair cushioned with "Turkey red." He was wondering if he might send for that homely old chair, and if he should, how it would look among these dignified surroundings. He didn't care a picayune how it might look—he decided that he simply had to have it if he stayed. Which proved that it really was homesickness for his country parish which

had attacked him that morning. Why not? Do you think him less of a man for that?

"Oh, yours'll go quite a way!" young Tom Lockhart assured him cheerfully. "And you can use the rest of the space for magazines and papers."

"Thanks!" replied Black, rather grimly grateful for this comforting suggestion. He and the twenty-year-old son of his hostess had become very good friends in the two days which had elapsed since Black's arrival. He had an idea that Tom was going to be a distinct asset in the days to come. The young man's fair hair and blue eyes were by no means indicative of softness—being counteracted by a pugnacious snub nose, a chin so positive that it might easily become a menace, and a grin which decidedly suggested impishness.

"I'll help unpack these, if you like."

Tom laid hold of the books with a will. Black, his coat off, set them up, thereby indisputably demonstrating that two hundred and thirty-one volumes, even though a round two dozen of them be bulky with learning, certainly do fill an inconceivably small space.

"Well, anyhow," he said, resting from his labours, and determinedly turning away from the embarrassing testimony of the bookshelves as to his resources, to the invitation of the massive desk to be equipped with the proper appliances to work, "a few pictures and things will help to make it look as if somebody lived here. I've several pretty good photographs and prints I thought I'd frame when I got here—I've been saving them up for some time."

He exhibited the collection with pride—they had lain across the top of the books. Tom Lockhart hung over them critically.

"They're bully!" was his judgment. "Not a bit what I'd have expected. Not a saint or a harp among 'em. Oh, gee!—that horse race is great! Where'd you get that? I mean—it's foreign, isn't it?"

Black laughed. "That's just a bit of a hurdle race we had in a little town down South. I'm on one of those horses."

"You are! Oh, yes—I see—on the front one! Why, say—" he turned to Black, enthusiasm lighting his face—"you're one of those regular horse-riding Southerners. This is on your family estate, I'll wager."

Black's face flushed a little, but his eyes met the boy's frankly. "I was born in Scotland, and came over here when I was sixteen. I worked for the man who lived in that house back there at the left. He let me ride his horses. I broke the black one for him—and rode him to a finish in that race. I was only seventeen then."

Tom stared for a minute before his manners came to the rescue. "That's awfully interesting," he said then, politely. Black could see the confusion and wonderment in his mind as plainly as if the boy had given expression to it. If the information had let Tom down a little, the next instant he rallied to the recognition that here was a man out of the ordinary. Tom was not a snob, but he had never before heard a minister own to "working" for anybody, and it had startled him slightly. But when he regarded Black, he saw a man who, while he looked as if he had never worked for anybody, had not hesitated to declare that he had. Tom thought he liked the combination.

"If you could tell me of a good place to get these framed," Black said, gathering up the photographs and prints as he spoke, "I believe I'll have it done right away.

It's the one thing that'll make this big house seem a little more like home."

"That's right. And I can tell you a peach of a place—in fact I'll take you there, if you want to go right now. It's on our way back home. By the way—" young Tom glanced round the big bare room—"if there's any stuff you want to get for the house to give it a kind of a jolly air, you know, you'll find it right there, at Jane Ray's. She can advise you, too."

"I don't suppose I'll get anything but the frames," Black answered cautiously, as the two went out together. He had received an advance on his new salary, and therefore he had more money in his pocket than he had ever had before at one time, but he was too much in the habit of needing to count every penny to think of starting out to buy anything not strictly necessary. And already he knew Tom for the usual careless spender, the rich man's son. Very likely, he thought, this place to which Tom was to take him was the most expensive place in the suburban town. On second thought, he decided to take along only two of his pictures—till he knew the prices he must pay.

It had not been a particularly busy morning for Jane Ray. She was occupied with only one customer at the moment when Robert Black and young Thomas Lockhart came down the side street upon which fronted her shop—a side street down which many feet were accustomed to turn, in search of Jane and her wares.

The customer with whom she was occupied stood with her at the rear of the shop before several specimens of antique desks and chairs. All about were other pieces, some of them proclaiming themselves rather rare. Jane Ray herself also looked rather rare—for a shopkeeper,

inasmuch as she did not look like a shopkeeper at all, though the chaste severity of her business attire rivalled that of her latest acquired possession over which that morning she was gloating—a genuine Adam mirror. This mirror reflected faithfully Jane's smooth, chestnut brown head, her slightly dusky skin with an underlying tinge of pink, her dark eyes which held a spice of mischief in spite of their cool alertness of glance, her faintly aggressive chin—which meant that she could argue with you about the value of her goods and hold her own, and in the end convince you, without making you unhappy about it—which is a rare accomplishment, especially in so young a woman as was Miss Ray.

Robert Black and Tom, the latter self-constituted guide to furnishing a manse with what might be called its superfluous necessities, entered the shop and stood waiting. Jane saw them in her Adam mirror, but she continued to discuss with her other customer the relative merits of a Chippendale desk having all manner of hidden springs and drawers in it, with those of a Sheraton pouch-table, a work-table with a silken bag beneath it, and essentially feminine in its appeal. The customer was making a present to his wife, and had fled to Jane in this trying emergency—as did many another man. Jane always knew.

"Isn't this some place?" murmured young Lockhart, proudly, hanging over a glass show-case on a cherry gate-table. "Ever get into a woman's shop that catered to men like this one? Look at this case of pipes—aren't they stunners? She knows all there is to know about every last thing she sells, and what's more, she never keeps anything but good stuff. Some of it's pretty rare, and all of it's corking. Look at those cats' eyes!"

But Black had caught sight of certain headlines in a

New York daily lying beside the case of semi-precious stones which had attracted Tom. It was a late morning edition, and this suburban town lay too far from New York for the later morning editions to reach it before early afternoon—anyhow, they were not to be had at the newsstands before two o'clock, as Black had discovered yesterday. He seized the paper, wondering how this woman shopkeeper had achieved the impossible. He was a voracious reader of war-news, this Scotsman by blood and American to the last loyal drop of it. But he was not satisfied with America's part in the great conflict. For this was April, nineteen sixteen, and the thing had been going on for almost two years.

He devoured the black headlines.

"NO BREAK IN THE FRENCH LINES YET.
SEVENTH WEEK OF THE STRUGGLE AT VERDUN
TOTAL GAIN ONLY FOUR TO FIVE MILES
ON A THIRTY-FIVE MILE FRONT."

He flamed into low, swift speech, striking the paper before him with his fist. Tom, listening, forgot to gaze upon the contents of the case before him.

"Those French—aren't they magnificent? Why aren't we there, fighting by their sides? Oh, we'll get there yet, but it's hard to wait. Think of those fellows—holding on two long, anxious years! And they came over here—Lafayette and the rest—and poured out their blood and their money for us. And we think we're doing something when we send them a little food and some tobacco to buck up on!"

"I say—do you want to fight—a minister? Why, I thought all your profession asked for was peace!" Young

Tom's tone was curious. He did not soon forget the look in the face of the man who answered him.

"Peace! We do want peace—but not peace without honour! And no minister fit to preach preaches anything like that! Don't think it of us!"

"Well, I used to hear Doctor Curtin—the man before you. He seemed to think—— But I didn't agree with him," Tom hastened to say, suddenly deciding it best not to quote the pacific utterances of the former holder of the priestly office. "I thought we ought to go to it. If this country ever does get into it—though Dad thinks it'll all be settled this year—you bet I'll enlist."

"Enlist! I should say so!" And Black took up the paper again, eagerly reading aloud the account which followed the headlines of the sturdy holding of the fiercely contested ground at Verdun—that name which will be remembered while the world lasts.

He looked up at length to find that the other customer had gone, and that Miss Ray, the shopkeeper, had come forward. He looked into a face which reflected his own pride in the French prowess, and forgot for the instant that he had come to buy of her or that she was there to sell.

"It's great, isn't it—the way they are holding?" she said, in a pleasant, low voice.

"Great?—it's glorious! By the way—how do you get hold of this late edition so early?"

"Have it sent up by special messenger from the city. Otherwise it would be held over with the rest of the papers till the two o'clock train."

Tom broke in. "Pretty clever of you, *I* say, Miss Ray. Just like the rest of your business methods—always ahead of the other fellow!"

"Thank you, Mr. Lockhart," Miss Ray answered.

"It wouldn't do to let one's methods become as antique as one's goods in this case, would it?"

"Miss Ray, I want to present my friend, Mr. Black." Tom forgot his new friend's title as he made this introduction, but of course it didn't matter. Though Miss Ray seldom attended church anywhere, she could hardly fail, in the talkative suburban town, to know that at the "Stone Church" there was a new man. "He wants to get some of his pictures framed, and of course I led him here," added Tom, with his boyish grin. He looked at Miss Ray with his usual frankly admiring gaze. No doubt but she was worth it. Not often does a woman shopkeeper achieve the subtle effect of being a young hostess in her own apartments as did Jane Ray. And, as every woman shopkeeper knows, that is the highest, as it is the most difficult, art of shopkeeping.

She scanned the pictures—one that of the hurdle race, the other a view of a country road, with a white spired church in the distance. In no time she had them fitted into precisely the right frames, these enhancing their values as well-chosen frames do. Delighted but still cautious, Black inquired the prices. Miss Ray mentioned them, adding the phrase with which he was familiar, "with the clerical discount."

"Thank you!" acknowledged Black. "What are they without the discount, please?"

Miss Ray glanced at him. "I am accustomed to give it," she observed.

"I am accustomed not to take it," said the Scotsman, firmly. "But I'm just as much obliged."

She smiled, and told him the regular price. He counted this out, expressed his pleasure in having found precisely what he wanted, and led the way out.

Jane Ray looked after his well-set shoulders, noting that he did not put his hat upon his close-cut, inclined-to-be-wirily-curly black hair until he had reached the street. Then she looked down at the money in her hand. "Wouldn't take a discount—and didn't ask me to come to his church," she commented to herself. "Must be rather a new sort." She then promptly dismissed him from her thoughts—until later in the day, when the memory was brought back to her by another incident.

It was well along in the afternoon, and she had just sold a genuine Eli Terry "grandfather" clock at a fair profit, and had bargained for and secured several very beautiful pieces of Waterford glass which she had long coveted. A succession of heavy showers had cleared her shop, and she had found time to open a long roll which the expressman had delivered in the morning, when the shop door admitted a person to whom she turned an eager face.

"Oh, I'm glad it's you!" she said. "Come and see what I have *now!*"

"Nothing doing," replied R. P. Burns, M.D., with, however, a smile which belied his words. "I want a present for a sick baby I'm going to fix up in the morning. One of those painted Russian things of yours—the last boy went crazy over 'em. No time for antiques."

"This isn't an antique—it's the last word from the front, and *you'll* go crazy over *it*," replied Miss Ray. Nevertheless she left the roll and went to a corner in the back of the shop given over to all sorts of foreign made and fascinating wooden toys. She selected a bear with a wide smile and feet which walked, and a gay-hued parrot on a stick, and took them to the big man who was waiting, like Mercury, poised on an impatient foot. While he

counted out the change she slipped over to her roll of heavy papers, took out one, and when he looked up again it was straight into a great French war poster held at the length of Jane's extended arms. He stared hard at it, and well he might, for it was by one of the most famous of French artists, whose imagination had been flaming with the vision of the desperate day.

"Well, by Joe!" Burns ejaculated, his hurry forgot. "I say——"

The poster's owner waited quietly, lost to view behind the big sheet. Burns studied every detail of the picture, losing no suggestion indicated by the clever lines of the inspired pencil. It was only a rough sketch, impressionistic to the last degree, yet holding unspoken volumes in each bold outline. Then he drew a deep breath.

"Where did you get it?" he asked, as Jane lowered the poster. His eye went back to the roll lying half opened on a mahogany table near by.

"They were sent over by an officer I know—straight from Paris. That isn't the most wonderful one by half, but I want you to see the rest when you're not so rushed for time."

"I'm not particularly rushed," replied Burns, with a grin. "At least, I can stop if you've any more like this. I have to tear in and out of your place, you know, because there's always some idiot lurking behind one of your screens to leap out and ask me searching questions about patients. If you'll bar your doors to the public some day, I'll come and spend an hour gazing at your stuff. Let's see the posters, please."

Jane spread them out, one after another, till half the shop was covered. Burns walked from poster to poster, intent, frowning with interest, his quick intelligence recog-

nizing the extraordinary impressions he was getting, his own imagination firing under the stimulus of an art at its marvellous best. Before one of the smaller posters he lingered longest—a wash drawing in colour of a poilu holding his child in his arms, with its mother looking into his face.

"He's just a kid, that fellow," he said, in a smothered tone, "just a kid, but he's giving 'em both up. He won't come back—somehow you know that. And—it doesn't seem to matter, if he helps save his country. See here—you ought to do something with these. If the people of this town could see them, a few more of them might wake up to the idea that there's a war on somewhere."

"As soon as some English ones come I've sent for I intend to have an exhibition, here in my shop, and sell them—for the benefit of French and Belgian orphans. I expect to get all kinds of prices. Will you auction them off for me?"

"You bet I will—if I can do it explosively enough. I'd do anything on earth for a little chap like that." He indicated a wistful Belgian baby at the edge of a group of children. "Here are our youngsters, fed up within an inch of their lives, and these poor little duffers living on scraps, and too few of those. Oh, what a contrast! As for ourselves—we come around and buy antiques to make our homes more stunning!"

He looked her in the eye, and she looked steadily back. Then she went over to an impressive Georgian desk, opened a drawer and took out a black-bound book. Returning, she silently held it out to him. It was a text book on nursing, one of those required in a regulation hospital course.

"Eh? What?" he ejaculated, taking the book. "Study-

ing, are you—all by yourself? How far are you?" He flipped the pages. "I see. Are you serious?—You, a successful business woman? What do you want to do it for?"

"Absolutely serious. This country will go into the war some day—it must, or I can't respect it any more. And when it does—well, keeping an antique shop will be the deadest thing there is. I'll nail up the door and go 'over there.'"

"And not to collect curios this time?" His bright hazel eyes were studying her intently.

"Hardly. To be of use, if I can. I thought the more I knew of nursing——"

"You can't get very far alone, you know."

"I can get far enough so that when I do manage to take a course I can rush it—can't I?"

"Don't know—hard to cut any red tape. But all preparation counts, of course. Well—I'll give you a question to answer that'll show up what you do know."

He proceeded to do this, considering for a minute, and then firing at her not one but a series of interrogations. These were not unkindly technical, but designed to test her practical knowledge of the pages—which according to the marker he had found—she had evidently lately finished. The answers she gave him appeared to satisfy him, though he did not say so. Instead, closing the book with a snap, he said:

"When you sail my wife and I will be on the same ship. We'd be there now if we had our way—it's all we talk about. Well——"

And he was about to say that he must hurry like mad now to make up for time well lost, when the shop door opened to admit out of a sharp dash of rain a customer

who was trying to shelter a flat package beneath his coat. For the second time that day Robert Black was bringing pictures to be framed; in fact, they were the rest of the pile which he had not ventured to bring the first time, lest Miss Ray's prices be too high for him.

Red gave him one look, and would have fled, but Black did not make for the big doctor with outstretched hand—in fact, he did not seem to see him. At the very front of the shop stood a particularly distinguished looking Hepplewhite sideboard, its serpentine front exquisitely inlaid with satinwood, its location one to catch the eye. It caught Black's eye—but not because of any cunning design of maker or shopkeeper. Having filled the available space in the rear of the shop with her war posters, Jane had worked toward the front, and the last and most splendid of them she had propped upon the sideboard. In front of it Black now came to a standstill, and Red, intending to leave the place in haste at sight of the minister he was in no hurry to meet, involuntarily paused to note the effect upon the "Kid"—as he persisted in calling him—of the poster's touchingly convincing appeal.

It was a drawing in black and white of a French mother taking leave of her son, that subject which has employed so many clever pens and brushes since the war began, but than which there is none more universally powerful in its importunity. The indomitable courage in the face of the Frenchwoman had in it a touch beyond that of the ordinary artist to convey—one could not analyze it, but it gripped the heart none the less, as Red himself could testify. He now watched it grip Black.

Without taking his eyes from the picture Black propped his umbrella against a chair, laid his hat and his package upon it, and stood still before the Frenchwoman and her

boy, unconscious of anything else. And as he stood there, slowly his hands, hanging at his sides, became fists which clenched themselves. Red, observing, his own hand upon the big wrought-iron latch of the door, paused still a moment longer. The "Kid" cared, did he? How much did he care, then? Red found himself rather wanting to know.

Black looked up at last, saw the other man, saw that he was the quarry he was so anxious to run down, but only said, as his gaze returned to the poster, "And she's only one of thousands, all with a spirit like that!"

"Only one," Red agreed. "They're astonishing, those Frenchwomen." Then he went on out and closed the door behind him.

After he had gone he admitted to himself that since his wife was a member of this man's church, and Black probably knew that fact, he himself might have stayed long enough to shake hands. At close range his eyesight, trained to observe, had not been able to avoid noting that Black was no boy, after all. There had been that in the face he had momentarily turned toward Red to show plainly that he was in the full first maturity of manhood. It may be significant that from this moment, in whatever terms Red spoke of the minister at home when he was forced by the exigencies of conversation to mention him at all, he ceased to call him "the Kid." So, though Black did not know it, he had passed at least one barrier to getting to know the man he meant to make his friend.

CHAPTER III

NO ANÆSTHETIC

OF COURSE the day came, as it inevitably must, when Black and Red actually met, face to face, with no way out but to shake hands, look each other in the eye, and consider their acquaintance made? No, that day of proper introduction never came. But the day did come on which they looked each other in the eye without shaking hands—and another day, a long time after, they did shake hands. As to their friendship—but that's what this story is about.

The day on which they looked each other in the eye first was on a Sunday morning, rather early. Black had done a perfectly foolhardy thing. It was a late June day, and the cherries in a certain tree just outside his bathroom window were blood-red ripe and tempting. Fresh from his cold tub—clad in shirt and trousers, unshaven—his mouth watering at the thought of eating cherries before breakfast, he climbed out of the window upon the sloping roof of the side porch, and let himself down to the edge to reach the cherries. He never knew how the fool thing happened, really; the only thing he did know was that he slipped suddenly upon the edge of the roof, wet with an early morning shower, and fell heavily to the ground below, striking on his right shoulder. And then, presently, he was sitting at the telephone in his study, addressing R. P. Burns, M. D., in terms which

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strove to be casual, inviting him to make a morning call at the manse.

"I'd come over myself," he explained, "but I'm ashamed to say I'm a trifle shaky."

"Naturally," replied the crisp voice at the other end of the wire. "Go and lie down till I get there."

"Please have your breakfast first," requested Black, struggling hard to master a growing faintness. Whatever he had done to his shoulder, it hurt rather badly, though he didn't mind that so much as the idea of disgracing himself in Burns' eyes by going white and flabby over what was probably a trivial injury. To be sure he couldn't use his arm, but it didn't occur to him that he had actually dislocated that shoulder by so trifling a means as a slip from the manse roof. The manse roof, of all places! It wasn't built for incumbent ministers to go upon, between a bath and a shave, and tumble from like a little boy —and on a Sunday morning, too!

The answer Red gave to Black's suggestion that he have breakfast before coming resembled a grunt more than anything else. Black couldn't determine whether the red-headed doctor meant to do it or not. The question was settled within five minutes by the arrival of Red, who came straight in at the open manse door, followed the call Black gave, "In here, please—at your left," and appeared in the study doorway, surgical bag in his hand, and a somewhat grim expression—with which Black had already become familiar at a distance—upon his lips. Black sat in his red-cushioned wooden rocker, that most incongruous piece of furniture in the midst of the black walnut dignity of the manse study, and in it his appearance suggested that of a sick boy who has taken refuge in his mother's arms. Indeed, it may have been with somewhat of that

feeling that he had chosen it as the place in which to wait the coming of aid. Anyhow, his face, under its unshaven blur of beard, looked rather white, though his voice was steady.

"Mighty sorry to bother you at this hour, Doctor Burns," he began, but was interrupted.

"Didn't I tell you to lie down? What's the use of sitting up and getting faint?"

"I'm all right."

"Yes, I see! All alone here? Thought you had a housekeeper." Red was opening up his bag and laying out supplies as he spoke.

"I have. She's gone home for over Sunday."

"They usually have—when anything happens. Well, come over here on this couch, if you can walk, and we'll see what the trouble is."

Black demonstrated that he could walk, though it was with considerable effort. Through all his undeniable faintness he was thinking with some exultation that this was a perfectly good chance to meet Red—and on his own ground, too. What luck!

Red made a brief examination.

"You've fixed that shoulder, all right," he announced. "No matter—we'll have you under a whiff of ether, and reduce it in a jiffy."

"Thanks—no ether, please. You mean I've dislocated it?" inquired the patient, speaking with some difficulty.

"Good and proper. Here you are——" And without loss of time a peculiarly shaped article, made of wire and gauze and smelling abominably, came over Black's face. It was instantly removed.

"I believe I said no ether, if you please!" remarked an extraordinarily obstinate voice.

"Nonsense, man! I'm only going to give you enough to relax you. I see some good stiff muscles there that may give me trouble."

"Ether'll make me sick, and I've got to preach this morning."

"Preach—nothing!"

"It may be nothing," agreed the patient, "but I'm going to preach it, just the same. And I won't have an anæsthetic, thank you just as much, Doctor."

Red said no more. No surgeon but is astute enough to tell whether a patient is bluffing or whether he means it. Unquestionably, though Black's face was the colour of ashes, he meant it. Therefore Red proceeded to reduce the dislocation, without the advantage to himself—or to the patient—of the relaxing aid of the anæsthetic. It was a bad dislocation, and it took the doctor's own sturdy muscles and all his professional skill to do the trick in a few quick, efficient moves and one tremendous pull. But it was all over in less time that it takes to tell it, and only one low groan had escaped Black's tightly pressed lips. Nevertheless his forehead was wet and cold when he lay limp at the end of that bad sixty seconds.

A strong arm came under his shoulders, and a glass was held to his lips. "Drink this—you'll be all right in a minute," said a rather far-away voice, and Black obediently swallowed something which he didn't much like—and which he probably would have refused to take if he had suspected that it was going to help buck him up the way it did. He had an absurd idea of not allowing himself to be bucked up by anything but his own will—not in the presence of Red, anyhow.

"Some nerve—for a preacher," presently said the voice, which sounded nearer now.

"Why—a preacher?" inquired Black, as belligerently as a man can who is stretched upon his back with his coat off, his arm being bandaged to his side, and a twenty-four hours' growth of beard on his somewhat aggressive chin.

"Never mind," Red commanded. "We won't have it out now. I don't blame you—that was hitting a man when he's down."

"I'm not down." Black attempted to sit up. A vigorous arm detained him where he was.

"Just keep quiet a few minutes, and you'll be the gainer in the end. By the way—can you shave with your left hand?"

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"I never tried it." Black's left hand took account of his cheek and chin. "I was just going to shave when those—fool—cherries caught my eye."

"Where's your shaving stuff?"

Black looked up, startled. "Oh, I can't let you——"

"Who's going to do it? If you must preach, you don't want to go to it looking like a pugilist, do you? Though I'm not so sure——" Red left the sentence unfinished, while a wicked smile played round his lips.

"I'll do it myself—or send for a barber."

"Oh, come on, Black! I'm perfectly competent to do the job, and now I've got my hand in on you I'd like to leave you looking the part you wouldn't insist on playing if you weren't pretty game. I'm not so sure I ought to let you——"

"I'd like to see you help it," declared Black, and now he was smiling, too, and feeling distinctly better.

So it ended by Red's going upstairs after the shaving materials, and then shaving Black, and doing it with decidedly less finish of style than might have been expected of a crack surgeon with a large reputation. He

cut his victim once, and Black, putting up a hand and getting it all blood and lather, grinned up into Red's face, who grinned back and expressed his regret at the slip. This does not mean that they had become friends—not from Red's standpoint, at least, who would have befriended a sick dog and then shot him without compunction because he didn't want him around. But it does mean that at last the two had met, on a man-to-man basis, and that Red's respect for the man he had been in no hurry to meet had been considerably augmented. Black was pretty sure of this, and it helped to brace him more than the stimulant had done.

Two hours later Red cut a call on a rich patient much shorter than was politic, in order to get to the Stone Church in time to slip into a back pew. Before going in he gave young Perkins instructions not to call him out before the sermon ended for anything short of murder on the church doorstep, surprising that lively usher very much, since it was the first time such a thing had ever happened. In making this effort Red had Black in mind as a patient rather than a minister. A severe dislocation must naturally cause a certain amount of nervous shock which might prove disastrous to a man attempting to carry through a long service and spend most of the period upon his feet, within two hours after the accident occurred. Game though Black might be—well—Red admitted to himself that he rather wanted to see how the fellow whom he could no longer call "the Kid" would see the thing through.

Reactions are curious things. In this case, though it was true that Black had to steady himself more than once to keep his congregation from whirling dizzily and disconcertingly before his eyes, had to set his teeth and

summon every ounce of will he possessed to keep on through the first three quarters of his service, after all it was Red who got the most of the reaction. For the sermon which Black preached contained a bomb thrown straight at the heads of a parish which, with half the world at war, was in its majority distinctly pacifist—as was many another church during the year of 1916. Black, before his sermon was done, had taken an out-and-out, unflinching stand for the place of the Church in times of war, and had declared that it must be on the side of the sword, when the sword was the only weapon which could thrust its way to peace.

Red, listening closely, forgetting that the man before him was his patient, found himself involuntarily admitting that whatever else he was, Robert McPherson Black was fearless in his speech. And there was probably no use in denying that the fellow had a way of putting things that, as James Macauley had asserted, effectually prevented the man in the pew from becoming absorbed in reveries of his own. It had been by no means unusual for R. P. Burns, surgeon, expecting to do a critical operation on Monday morning, to perform that operation in detail on Sunday morning, while sitting with folded arms and intent expression before a man who was endeavouring to interest him in spiritual affairs. On the present occasion, however, though the coming Monday's clinical schedule was full to the hatches, Red was unable to detach himself for a moment from the subject being handled so vigorously by Black. Thus, listening through to the closing words, he discovered himself to be aflame with fires which another hand had kindled, and that hand, most marvellously, a preacher's.

Young Perkins, hovering close to the rear seat into

which Red had stolen upon coming in just before the sermon, considered the embargo raised with the closing words of Black, and had his whispered summons ready precisely as Black began his brief closing prayer. The scowl with which Red motioned him away surprised Perkins very much, causing him to retreat to the outer door, where in due season he delivered his message to the leisurely departing doctor—departing leisurely because he was eavesdropping.

"Well, I don't know about that," he had overheard one man of prominence saying to another in the vestibule. "Strikes me that's going pretty strong. What's the use of stirring up trouble? That sort of talk's going to offend. Pulpit's not called upon to go into matters of state—particularly now, when public sentiment's so divided. Somebody better put a flea in his ear, eh?"

The other man nodded. "I believe a good deal as he does myself," he admitted, cautiously, "but I don't hold with offending people who have as good a right to their opinions as he has. I saw Johnstone wriggling more than once, toward the last—and he's about the last man we want to make mad."

R. P. Burns laid a heavy hand on the speaker's arm. Turning, the other man looked into a pair of contemptuous hazel eyes, with whose glance, both friendly and fiery, he had been long familiar. "Oh, *rot!*" said a low voice in his ear.

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. Think it out." And Burns was gone, in the press, with the quickness now of one accustomed to get where he would go, no matter how many were in the way.

He marched around to the vestry door, where he found

Black standing, his gown off, his face gone rather white, though it had been full of colour when Red saw it last.

"Faint?" he asked.

"No—thanks, I'm all right. Just thought I'd like a whiff of fresh air."

"Take a few deep breaths. I'll give you a pick-up, if you say so."

Black shook his head. "I'm all right," he repeated.

"Shoulder ache?"

"Not much. I'm all right, I tell you, Doctor. Can't you get over the idea that a preacher is a man of straw? Why, I—will you try a wrestle with me, sometime—when my shoulder's fit again?"

Red laughed. "Down you in two minutes and fifteen seconds," he prophesied.

"Try it, and see." And Black walked back into the church, his cheek losing its pallor in a hurry.

On that Sunday the Lockharts, his first entertainers, insisted that he come to dinner. Though he had kept his slung shoulder and arm under his gown, the facts showed plainly, and the congregation was full of sympathy. With his housekeeper away, Black could find no way out, though he would have much preferred remaining quietly in his study, with four cups of coffee of his own amateur making, and whatever he could find in his larder left over from Saturday.

So he went to the Lockharts', and there he met a person who had been in his congregation that morning, but whom he had not noted. She had seen that he had not noted her, but she had made up her mind that such blindness should not long continue. Her appearance was one well calculated to arrest the eye of man, and Black's eye,

though it was accustomed to dwell longer upon man than upon woman, was not one calculated by Nature to be altogether and indefinitely undiscerning.

With Annette Lockhart, daughter of the house, the guest, Miss Frances Fitch, a former school friend, held a brief consultation just before Black's arrival.

"Think he's the sort to fall for chaste severity, or feminine frivolity, when it comes to dress, Nanny?"

Miss Lockhart looked her friend over. "You're just the same old plotter, aren't you, Fanny Fitch?" she observed, frankly. "Well, it will take all you can do, and then some, if you expect to interest Mr. Black. But—if you want my advice—I should say chaste severity was your line."

"There's where you show your unintelligence," declared Miss Fitch. "I shall be as frilly as I can, because you yourself are a model of smooth and tailored fitness, and he will want a relief for his eyes. He shall find it in me. Really, wasn't he awfully game to preach, with that shoulder?"

"He's a Scot," said Nan Lockhart. "Of course he would, if it killed him."

The result of this exchange of views was that Miss Fitch appeared looking like a fascinating young saint in a sheer white frock. Had she a white heart? Well, anyhow, she looked the embodiment of ingenuousness, for her masses of fair hair were too curly to be entirely subdued, no matter how confined, and her deep blue eyes beneath the blonde locks might have been those of a beautiful child.

"Oh, I say!" ejaculated Tom Lockhart, when she first came downstairs, the transformation from her dark smoothness of church garb to this spring-like outburst of

whiteness hitting him full in his vulnerable young heart—as usual.

"Well—like me, Tommy dear?" asked Fanny Fitch, letting her fingers rest for the fraction of a second on his dark-blue coat-sleeve.

"Like you!" breathed Tom. "I say—why did I bring him home to dinner? Now you'll just fascinate him—and forget me!"

"Forget *you?* Why, Tom!" And Miss Fitch gave him an enchanting glance which made his heart turn over. Then she went on into the big living room, where Robert McPherson Black, damaged shoulder and arm in a fine black silk sling, the colour now wholly restored to his interesting face, rose courteously to be presented to her. Of course he did not know it, but it was at that moment that he encountered a quite remarkable combination of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Up to now he had met each of these tremendous forces separately, but never before all together in one slim girl's form. And yet, right here, it must be definitely asserted and thoroughly assimilated, that Fanny Fitch was what is known as an entirely "nice" girl, and in her heart at that hour was nothing which could be called an evil intent. The worst that could be said of her was that she was ruthless in exacting tribute—even as Cæsar. And when her eye had fallen upon the minister, with his right arm out of commission but the rest of him exceedingly assertive of power, she had coveted him. To her, the rest seemed easy.

As to Black—he was not "easy." In his very young manhood he had loved very much the pretty daughter of his Southern employer, but she had been as far out of his reach as the furthermost star in the bright constellations which nightly met his eye in the skies above him. When she

had married he had firmly and definitely put the thought of woman out of his head, and had formulated a code concerning the whole sex intended to hold throughout his ministry. During his entire first pastorate he had been a model of discretion—as a young minister in a country community must be, if he would not have his plans for service tumbling about his ears. Fortunately for him he was, by temperament and by training, not over susceptible to any ordinary feminine environment or approach. He had a hearty and wholesome liking for the comradeship of men, greatly preferring it to the frequent and unavoidable association with women necessary in the workings of church affairs. Even when his eye first rested upon the really enchanting beauty of Miss Fanny Fitch, if he could have exchanged her, as his companion at the Lockhart dinner table, for R. P. Burns, M. D., he would have done it in the twinkling of an eye. For had not Red shaved him that morning, and wasn't another barrier most probably well down? It was of that he was thinking, and not, just then, of her.

But she forced him to think of her—it was an art in which she was a finished performer. She did it by cutting up for him that portion of a crown roast of spring lamb which Mr. Samuel Lockhart sent to him upon his plate. Up to that moment, throughout the earlier courses, he had been engaged with the rest in a general discussion of the subject of the war, quite naturally brought up by the sermon of the morning. But when it came to regarding helplessly the food which now appeared before him unmanageable by either fork or spoon, he found himself for the first time talking with Miss Fitch alone, while the conversation of the others went ahead upon a new tack.

"Oh, but this makes me think of how many poor

fellows have to have their food cut up for them, over there," she was saying, as her pretty, ringless fingers expertly prepared the tender meat for his consumption. "While you were speaking this morning I was wishing, as I've been wishing ever since this terrible war began, that I could be really helping, on the other side. If it hadn't been for my mother, who is quite an invalid, I should have gone long ago. You made it all so *real*——"

A man may tell himself that he doesn't like flattery, but if it is cleverly administered—and if, though he is modest enough, he can't help knowing himself that he has done a good thing in a fine way—how can he quite help being human enough to feel a glow of pleasure? If it's not overdone—and Miss Fitch knew much better than that—much can thus be accomplished in breaking down a masculine wall of reserve. Black's wall didn't break that Sunday—oh, not at all—but it undeniably did crumble a little bit along the upper edges.

After dinner was over, however, as if he were somehow subtly aware that the wall was undergoing an attack, Black withdrew with the other men to the further end of the living room to continue to talk things over. He was at some pains to seat himself so that he was facing these men, and had no view down the long room to the other end, where the women were gathered.

Miss Fitch, looking his way from a corner of a great divan, sent a smile and a wave toward Tom, who, torn between allegiance to Fanny and his new and absorbing devotion to Black, had for the time being followed the men. Then she said negligently to Nan Lockhart:

"Your minister certainly has a stunning profile. Look at it there against that dark blue curtain."

Nan looked for an instant, then back at her guest.

"Oh, Fanny!" she murmured, rebukingly, "don't you ever get tired of that game?"

"What game, my dear?"

"Oh—playing for every last one of them!" answered Annette Lockhart, with some impatience. She was a dark-eyed young woman with what might be called a strong face, by no means unattractive in its clean-cut lines. She had a personality all her own; she had been a leader always; people liked Nan Lockhart, and believed in her thoroughly. Her friendship for Fanny Fitch was a matter of old college ties—Fanny was nobody's fool, and she was clever enough to keep a certain hold upon Nan through the exercise of a rather remarkable dramatic talent. Nan had written plays, and Fanny had acted them; and now that college days were over they had plans for the future which meant a continued partnership in the specialty of each.

"Interested in him yourself, I judge," Miss Fitch replied teasingly. "Don't worry! The chances are all with you. He's horribly sober minded—he'll fall for your sort sooner than for mine."

But a certain gleam in her eyes said something else—that she was quite satisfied with the beginning she had made. Another man might have taken a seat where he could look at her; that Black deliberately looked the other way this astute young person considered proof positive that he found her unexpectedly distracting to his thoughts.

When, at the end of an hour, Black turned around, ready to take his farewell, Miss Fitch was absent from the room. He glanced about for her, found her not, told himself that he was glad, and went out. As the door of the living room closed behind him, she came down the stairs, a

white hat on her head, a white parasol in her hand. They passed out of the house door together. At the street Miss Fitch turned in the direction of the manse, two blocks away. Black paused and removed his hat—with his left hand he did it rather awkwardly.

"It's been very pleasant to meet you," he said. "Is your stay to be long?"

"Several weeks, I believe. Are you really going that way, Mr. Black—or don't you venture to walk down the street with any members of your congregation except men?"

He smiled. "I am really going this way, Miss Fitch—thank you! Would you care to know where?"

"To Doctor Burns—with your arm, I suppose. Is it very painful?"

"It's doing very well. Isn't this a magnificent day? I hope you'll have a pleasant walk."

"I can hardly help it, thank you—I'm so fond of walking—which Nan Lockhart isn't—hard luck for me! Good bye—and I shall not soon forget what I heard this morning."

Her parting smile was one to remember—not a bit of pique that he hadn't responded to her obvious invitation—no coquetry in it either, just charming friendliness, exceedingly disarming. As he turned away, striding off in the opposite direction from that which he naturally would have taken, he was frowning a little and saying to himself that it was going to be rather more difficult to keep the old guard up in a place like this than it had been in his country parish. His good Scottish conscience told him that though in deciding on the instant to make Doctor Burns a visit he had committed himself to something he didn't want to do at all—go and bother the difficult doctor

with his shoulder when it wasn't necessary—he must do it now just the same, to square the thing. Heavens and earth—why shouldn't he walk down the street with a beautiful young woman in white if she happened to be going his way, instead of putting himself out to go where he hated to, just to avoid her? Not that he cared to walk with her—he didn't—he preferred not to. And the doctor would think him a weakling, after all, if he came to him complaining, as was the truth, that his shoulder was aching abominably, and his head to match, and that his pulse seemed to be jumping along unpleasantly. Well——

Just then R. P. Burns went by in his car at a terrific and wholly inexcusable speed, evidently rushing out of town. Black, recognizing him, breathed a sigh of relief. But he went around seven blocks to get back to the Manse without a chance of meeting anybody in white. At a very distant sight of anybody clothed all in white he turned up the first street, and this naturally lengthened his trip. So that when he was finally within the Manse's sheltering walls he was very glad to give up bluffing for the day, and to stretch himself upon the leather couch in the study where that morning he had doggedly refused an anæsthetic. He rather wished he had one now! Confound it—he felt that he had been a fool more than once that day. Why should ministers have to act differently from other men, in any situation whatever? He made up his mind that the next time he climbed out on a slippery roof on a Sunday morning—well, he would do it if he wanted to! But the next time he turned up a side street to avoid anybody—or changed his direction because anybody was going the same way——

When he woke an hour later it was because his shoulder really was extremely sore and painful. But he wouldn't

have called Burns if he had known that that skillful surgeon could take away every last twinge. Anyhow—Burns had shaved him that morning! There was that that was good to remember about the day. Sometime—he would come closer to the red-headed doctor than that!

CHAPTER IV

NOBODY TO SAY A PRAYER

MRS. HODDER, housekeeper at the manse, breathed a heavy sigh as she poured the minister's breakfast coffee. He looked up, as she had known he would; his ear seemed to be sensitive to sighs.

"It's queer, how things go for some people," she said. "I can't get over feeling that a body should have Christian burial, no matter what the circumstances is."

"Tell me about it," said Black promptly. Mrs. Hodder was not a talker—he did not think she was a gossip. She had been selected for him by his good friend Mrs. Lockhart, who had had in mind the necessity of finding the minister a housekeeper built on these desirable lines. Mrs. Hodder came as near such lines as seemed humanly possible, though she had her faults. So had the minister, as he was accustomed to remind himself, whenever he discovered a new one in his housekeeper.

So Mrs. Hodder told him, and as he listened a peculiar frown appeared between his eyebrows. The thing she told him was of the sort to touch him to the quick. The moment he had finished his breakfast—which he did in a hurry—he went into the study, closed the door, and called up a certain undertaker, whom—as is the case with the men of Black's profession—he had come to know almost before he knew the leading men of his church.

"Oh, that's nothing that need interest you, Mr. Black,"

replied the man of gloomy affairs, in the cheerful tone he employed out of working hours. "It's out in a community where there isn't any church—folks are dead against the church, at that. Nobody expects any service—there won't be but a handful there, anyhow. There's only the girl's grandmother for relatives—and the thing's best kept quiet. See?"

"I see. What time are you to leave the house?"

"Ten o'clock. But you——"

"There wouldn't be any actual objection to my coming, would there, Mr. Munson?"

"Why—I suppose not. They simply don't expect it—not used to it. And in this case—if you understand——"

"I do understand—and I very much want to come. The trolley runs within two miles, I believe."

"Why—yes. But I can send for you, if you insist—only—you know they're poor as poverty——"

"I want the walk, and I'll catch the trolley—thank you. If I should be a bit late——"

"Oh, I'll hold the thing for you—and—well, it's certainly very good of you, Mr. Black. I admit I like to see such things done right myself."

The conversation ended here, and Black ran for his trolley, with only time to snatch a small, well-worn black leather handbook from his desk. He had no time for a change of clothes—which he wouldn't have made in any case, though he was not accustomed to dress in clerical style upon the street, except in so far as a dark plainness of attire might suggest his profession rather than emphasize it.

He had two minutes to spare on a street corner, waiting for his car. On that corner was a florist's shop. Catching sight of a window full of splendid roses he rushed in, gave

an order which made the girl in charge work fast, and managed to speed up the whole transaction so successfully that when he swung on to the moving step he had a slim box under his arm. Only a dozen pink rosebuds—Black had never bought florist's roses in armfuls—but somehow he had felt he must take them. How account for this impulse—since the Scotch are not notably impulsive? But—right here it will have to be confessed that Black had in his veins decidedly more than a trace of Irish blood. And now it's out—and his future history may be better understood for the admission.

Some time after Black had caught his trolley, R. P. Burns, M. D., brought his car to a hurried standstill in front of Jane Ray's shop in the side street, and all but ran inside. The shop was empty at the moment, and Jane came forward at his call. He put a quick question:

"Have you heard anything of Sadie Dunstan lately?"

"Nothing—for a long time. I can't even find out where she has gone."

"I can tell you—but it will startle you. There's no time to break it gently, or I would. She got into trouble, and—came home to—die."

Jane was looking him straight in the face as he spoke, and he saw the news shock her, as he had known it would. Sadie Dunstan was a little, fair-haired girl who had been Jane's helper in the shop for a year, and in whom Jane had taken great interest. Then she had gone away—West somewhere—had written once or twice—had failed to write—Jane had unwillingly lost track of her. And now—here was Burns and his news.

"Where is she? Is she—still living?" Jane's usually steady voice was unsteady.

"No. She's to be buried—within the hour. I just

found it out—and came for you. I thought you might like to go."

"I'll be ready in three minutes. I'll lock the shop——"

Thus it was that two more people were shortly on their way to the place where little Sadie Dunstan, unhonoured and unmourned—except for one—lay waiting for the last offices earth could give her. But she was to have greater dignity shown her than she could have hoped.

"I did try to make a real woman of her," said Jane, in a smothered voice, when Red had told her what he knew of the pitiful story. Passing the small house that morning he had seen the sign upon the door, and remembering Jane Ray's lost protégée, had stopped to inquire. A neighbour had given him the tragic little history; the old grandmother, deaf and half blind in her chimney corner, had added a harsh comment or two; and only a young girl who said she was Sadie's sister and had but an hour before suddenly appeared from the unknown, had shown that she cared what had happened to Sadie.

"You did a lot for her," asserted Burns. "I think the girl meant to be straight. This was one of those under-promise-of-marriage affairs which get the weak ones now and then. Poor little girl—she wouldn't have wanted you to know—or me. She didn't give me a chance—though there probably wasn't one, anyway, by the time she got back here. I've had her under my care many a time in her girlhood, you know—she was a frail little thing, but mighty appealing. This younger sister is a good deal like her, as she looked when you took her first."

"I knew she had a sister, but thought she was far away somewhere."

"In an orphanage till this last year. She's only sixteen —a flower of a girl—and crying her heart out for Sadie.

The grandmother's a brute—the child can't stay with her."

"She'll not have to. I can make it up to Sadie—and I will."

Burns looked at the face in profile beside him. Jane Ray had a profile which might have been characterized as sturdily sweet; the lines were extremely attractive. Jane's quiet dress, the simple hat upon her head, were the last word in expensive, well-conceived fashion, but Burns did not know this. He only knew that Miss Ray always looked precisely as she ought to look—very nice, and a little distinguished, so that one noticed her approvingly, and people who did not know her usually wondered who she was. He was thinking as he glanced at her now that if she meant to make it up to Sadie by taking her young sister under her care, that sister would have an even better chance than Sadie had had—and lost.

"I wish we had brought some flowers," Jane said suddenly, as the car flew past the last houses of the main highway and began to climb the hills into the country backroads. "This is such a benighted little spot we're going to—they may not have any at all."

"Doubt it. But there wasn't time to hunt up flowers if we wanted to get there. Munson's in all kinds of a hurry to get this thing over. It's his busy day—as usual, when it happens to be a poor case. We'll do well if we make it now. Not much use in coming—there'll be no service. But we can at least see the box go down!"

He spoke grimly. But Jane had caught sight of a rose-bush in a dooryard crowded with white roses, and cried out imperiously:

"Stop one minute, please, Doctor Burns. I'll buy those roses or steal them. Please!"

The brakes ground, and Jane was out before the car stopped, pulling out a plump little purse as she ran. A countrywoman hurrying to her door to protest angrily at the spectacle of a girl filling her arms with white roses was met with the call: "I'm going to give you a dollar for them—please don't stop me. It's for a funeral, and we're late now!"

"Highway robbery," commented Burns, as Jane sprang in beside him. "But she'd have sold you her soul for a dollar—and dear at that."

"Oh, don't talk about souls, up here," Jane protested. "If your fine new man at the Stone Church wanted a job worth while he'd leave the smug people in the high-priced pews and come up here to look after barbarians who'll bury a poor girl without a prayer. Don't I know, without your telling me, that there'll be no prayer?—unless you make one?" She looked at him with sudden challenge. "I dare you to!" she said, under her breath.

Burns' hazel glance, with a kindling fire in it, met hers. "I take the dare," he answered, without hesitation. "I know the Lord's Prayer—and the Twenty Third Psalm. I'm not afraid to say them—for Sadie Dunstan."

The cynicism in Jane's beautifully cut lips melted unexpectedly into a quiver, and she was silent after that, till the car dashed up the last steep hill. They came out at the top almost in the dooryard of a small, weather-beaten cottage in front of which stood an undertaker's wagon, two men, and half a dozen women. These people were just about to go into the house, but stood back to let Doctor Burns—whom all of them knew—and Miss Ray—whom one of them knew—go in ahead.

As she went up the steps Jane braced herself for what she must see. Little fair-haired Sadie—come to this so

early—so tragically—and nobody to care—nobody to say a prayer—except a red-headed doctor, whose business it was not. At least—she had an armful of white roses. She wanted to take one look at Sadie—and then lay the roses so that they would cover her from the sight of the hard eyes all about her. She would do that—just that. Why not? What better could she do? She drew her breath deep, and set her lips, and walked into the poor little room. . . .

The thing she saw first was a glowing handful of wonderful pink rosebuds upon the top of the cheap black box —one could not dignify it by any other word than Burns had used—which held the chief position in the room. And then, at the foot of the box, she saw a tall figure with an open book in his hand come to do Sadie Dunstan honour. Jane Ray caught back the sob of relief which had all but leaped to her lips. She had not known, until that moment, how much she had wanted that prayer—she, who did not pray—or thought she did not.

Mr. Munson, in a hurry, watch in hand, allowed the few neighbours who had come barely time to crowd into the small room before he signalled the minister to go ahead and get it over. He was not an unfeeling man, but he had two more services on for the day—costly affairs—and both his assistants were ill, worse luck!, and he had had to look after this country backwoods burial himself. He had noted with some surprise the appearance of Doctor Burns and Miss Ray, though there was no use in ever being surprised at anything the erratic doctor might do. As for Miss Ray—he admired her very much, both for her charming personality and her business ability, which compelled everybody's respect. He wondered what on earth brought her here—what brought all three of them

here, slowing things up when the body might have been committed to the dust with the throwing of a few clods by his own competent fingers—and everybody in this heathen community better satisfied than the Stone Church man was likely to make them with his ritual. Thus thought Mr. Munson in his own heart, and all but showed it in his face.

But Black, though he held his book in his hand, gave them no ritual—not here in the house. He had meant to read the usual service, abbreviating and modifying it as he must. But somehow, as he had noted one face after the other—the impassive faces of the few men and women, the surlily stoic one of the old grandmother, the tear-wet one of the wretched young sister in her shabby short frock—and then had glanced just once at the set jaw of R. P. Burns and the desperate pity in the dark eyes of Jane Ray, he had felt impelled to change his plan.

Red, listening, now heard Black pray, as a man prays whose heart is very full, but whose mind and lips can do his bidding under stress. It was a very simple prayer—it could not be otherwise because Black was praying with just one desire in his heart, to reach and be understood by the one real mourner there before him. It is quite possible that he remembered less the One to whom he spoke than this little one by whom he wanted to be heard. It was for the little sobbing sister that he formulated each direct, heart-touching phrase, that she might know that after all there was Someone—a very great and pitiful Someone—who knew and cared because she had lost all she had in a hard and unpitiful world. And speaking thus, for her alone, Black quite forgot that Red was listening—and Red, somehow, knew that he forgot.

Jane Ray listened, too—it was not possible to do any-

thing else. Jane had never heard any one pray like that; she had not known it was ever done. It was at that moment that she first knew that the man who was speaking was a real man; such words could have been so spoken by no man who was not real, no matter how clever an actor he might be. Something in Jane's heart which had been hard toward any man of Black's profession—because she had known one or two whom she could not respect, and had trusted none of them on that account—softened a little while Black prayed. At least—this man was real. And she was glad—oh, glad—that he was saying words like these over the fair, still head of Sadie Dunstan, and that the little sister, who looked so like her that the sight of her shook Jane's heart, could hear.

Jane still held her roses when, after a while, the whole small group stood in the barren, ill-kept burial place which was all this poor community had in which to bestow its dead. It was only across the road and over the hill by a few rods, and when Mr. Munson had been about to send Sadie in his wagon, Black had whispered a word in his ear, and then had taken his place at one side of the black box with its glowing roses on the top. Red, discerning his intention, had taken two strides to the other side, displacing a shambling figure of a man who was slowly approaching for this duty. Mr. Munson, now seeing a revealing light, waved the unwilling bearer aside, and himself took the other end of the box. Together the three, looking like very fine gentlemen all—in contrast to those who followed—bore Sadie in decorum to her last resting place.

Now came the ritual indeed—every word of it—brief and beautiful, with its great phrases. When Mr. Munson, clods in hand, cast them at the moment—"*ashes to ashes, dust to dust,*"—Jane flung her white roses so swiftly down

after them that the little sister never saw the dark earth fall. Then she turned and took the trembling young figure in her own warm arms—and looking up, over Sue's head, Jane's eyes, dark with tears, met full the understanding, joyfully approving eyes of Robert Black. . . .

Striding down the hill, presently, having refused the offer of Mr. Munson to take him back in his own small car, Black was passed by Red and Jane, with a shabby little figure between them. At the foot of the hill the car stopped, and waited for Black to catch up. He came to its side, hat in hand, his eyes friendlily on Sue Dunstan, who looked up at him shyly through red lids.

"Will you ride on the running board—at least till we get to the trolley?" offered Red. "I thought you had gone with Munson. What's the matter? Was he in too much of a hurry to look after the minister?"

"No, he asked me. But I want to walk, thank you. I'm pretty fond of the country, and don't often get so far out."

"It was very good of you to come," said Jane Ray, gravely. "It—made all the difference. Mr. Munson told us he didn't ask you—you offered. But it's impossible not to wonder how you knew."

"My housekeeper came from somewhere near this region—she told me. It was very easy to come—easier than to stay away, after knowing. What a day this is—and what a view! Don't let me keep you—good bye." And he turned away even before Red, always in a hurry though he was, would have suggestively speeded his throbbing motor—a device by which he was accustomed to make a get-away from a passer-by who had held him up. As he went on Red put out an arm and waved a parting salute to the man behind him, at which Black, seeing the

friendly signal, smiled at the landscape in general, addressing it thus:

"You wouldn't do that, Red-Head, if you weren't beginning to like me just a bit—now would you?"

The car was barely out of sight when he heard a shriek behind him, and turning, found himself pursued by one of the women who had been in the cottage. She was waving a parcel at him—a small parcel done up in a ragged piece of newspaper, as he saw when he had returned to meet her. She explained that it contained some few belongings of Sue Dunstan which the girl had forgotten.

"They ain't much, but she might want 'em. She won't be comin' back, I guess—not if that Miss Ray keeps her that kept Sade before. She better keep a look-out on Sue—she's the same blood, an' it ain't no good."

"Thank you—I'll take this to her," Black agreed. His hat was off, as if she had been a lady, this unkempt woman who regarded him curiously. He was saying to himself that here was a place to which he must come again, it was so near—and yet so very, very far.

She would have stayed him to gossip about both Sadie and Sue, but he would have none of that, turned the talk his own way, and presently got away as adroitly as ever Red had done, leaving her looking after him with an expression of mingled wonder and admiration. Somehow he had given her the impression of his friendliness, and his democracy—and yet of the difference between herself and him. There was, once, a Man, beside a wayside well, who had given that same impression.

Until late evening he was busy; calls—a manse wedding—a committee meeting—an hour's study—so the rest of the June day went. But just as dusk was falling he tucked the newspaper parcel under his arm and went down

Jane Ray's side street. He did not know at all if she could be found at this hour, but he had an idea that Jane lived above her shop, and that if she were at home a bell which he had seen beside the door would bring her.

The shop was softly lighted with many candles, though no one seemed to be inside. When he tried the door, however, it was locked, and he rang the bell. A minute later he saw Jane coming through the shop from the back, and the suggestion of the hostess moving through attractive apartments was more vivid than ever. The door opened. Black held out his parcel.

"I'm sorry to bother you at this hour, Miss Ray, but I believe it's something the little girl left behind, and I thought she might want it to-night. I couldn't get here earlier."

"Oh, thank you! Won't you come in a minute and see Sue? I'd like you to see how different—and how dear—she looks. She's just back in the garden." Jane's expression was eager—not at all businesslike. She might have been a young mother offering to show her child.

"Garden?" questioned Black, following Jane through the candle-lighted shop.

"Actually a garden. You wouldn't think it, would you? But there is one—a very tiny one—and it's the joy of my life."

At the back of the shop she opened a door into one of the most inviting little rooms Black ever had seen—or dreamed of. Not crowded with antiques or curios—just a simple home room, furnished and hung with the most exquisite taste—a very jewel of a room, and lighted with a low lamp which threw into relief the dark polished surface of a table upon which stood a long row of finely bound books. But he was led quickly through this—though he

wanted to linger and look about him—through an outer door of glass which opened directly upon the garden. *Well!*

"It's not very much," said Jane, "as gardens go—but I'm terribly proud of it, just the same."

"It's wonderful!" Black exclaimed. "What a spot—among all these old brick buildings! Why—it looks like an English garden; every bit of space used—and all those trim walks—and the seat under the trees. Great!" And his eye dwelt delightedly on the box borders filled with flowers, on the tall rows of blue delphiniums and hollyhocks against the walls, on the one great elm tree at the back of it all beneath which stood a rustic seat.

"But here's something better yet," said Jane's voice quietly, beside him, and she brought him out upon the narrow, vine-hung porch which ran all across the back of the house. Here, on a footstool beside a big chair, sat Sue Dunstan, a little figure all in white, with hair in shining fair order as if it had just been washed and brushed, and shy eyes no longer red with tears. And Sue looked—yes, she looked as if she had forgotten everything in the world—except to love Jane Ray!

And then—she recognized the man who had stood at her sister's feet that morning and said strange words which had somehow comforted her. A flood of colour rushed into her cheeks—she crouched upon the footstool, not daring to look up again. Black sat down in the chair beside her—he knew Jane had been sitting there before him. He said Miss Ray had let him come out for just a minute to see the garden, and wasn't it a beautiful garden? He had known a garden something like that once, he said, and never another since, and he wondered if he could make one like it behind his house. Sue wasn't sure—she shook her

head—she seemed to think no one but Miss Ray could make such a garden.

Black didn't stay long—he knew he wasn't expected to. But he had made friends with Sue before he went—poor child, who had no friends. And he almost thought he had made friends with Jane Ray, too. Somehow he found himself wanting to do that—he didn't quite know why. Perhaps it was because she was very evidently a friend of Red. Yes—he thought that must be the reason why she interested him so much.

As they came back through the shop Jane paused to snuff a flaming candle with an old pair of brass snuffers—her face was full of colour in the rosy light—and remarked, "I'm going to have an exhibition of war posters some evening before long, Mr. Black—for the benefit of French and Belgian orphans. Would you care to speak of it among your friends? I think you saw some of the first posters I received. I have more and very wonderful ones now—many of them quite rare already. I want to attract the people with plenty of money—and some interest in things over there."

"I'll be delighted to mention it in church next Sunday," Black offered promptly.

"Oh—really?"

"Why not?"

"*I* don't know why not. I supposed you would. Your church people—they don't like——"

"Don't they?—I'll be all the more delighted to mention the war posters, then. Thank you for giving me the chance. And for showing me the garden—and Sue. She's a lucky girl—and so are you, aren't you?—to have such a chance. You'll make the most of it. Miss Ray, I think Sue never heard of—Somebody she ought to know.

She needs Him—even more than she needs you. Teach her the story of Him—will you? You don't mind my saying it? You couldn't mind—you care for her! Good-night!"

Jane Ray looked after the tall figure, striding swiftly away up the side street through the June twilight.

"You certainly aren't afraid," she thought, "to say exactly what you think. I like you for that, anyhow."

CHAPTER V

PLAIN AS A PIKESTAFF

ROBERT BLACK was dressing for a dinner—a men's dinner, to which Samuel Lockhart had invited him, and Tom Lockhart had commanded him.

"You see, I've got to be there," Tom had explained. "And Dad always asks a lot of ponderous old personages who bore you to death—or else make you red with rage at some of their fossil ideas. The only thing that saves the case for me to-night is that you're coming. I've stipulated that I sit near you—see? Mother wouldn't hear of my being next you—that honour is reserved for one of your trustees."

"I assure you I'm immensely flattered," Black had replied, with a real sense of warmth about the heart. He had grown steadily fonder of this interesting boy who was all but a man. "But isn't your good friend Doctor Burns to be there? Surely he'd save anybody from boredom."

"There!" Tom's tone was mocking. "Yes, he'll be there—after he comes—and before he goes. He'll come in just in time for the salad—no evening dress, just good old homespun, because he's had no time to change. Then he'll be called out before the coffee and the smokes—but he'll ask for a cup, just the same, and swallow it standing. Then he'll go out—and all the lights'll go out for me with him—except that you're there to keep the brain fires burning."

Black had laughed at this dismal picture, and had told the youngster that he would endeavour to save his life in the crisis. But now, as he dressed, he was not looking forward to the event. To tell the truth, although he had been present at many college and fraternity banquets, this was actually his first experience at a formal dinner in a private home. He was even experiencing a few doubts as to how to dress.

Good judgment, however, assured him that the one safe decision for a clerical diner-out was clerical dress. Having satisfied himself that every hair was in place, but having found one of his accessories missing, he went in search of Mrs. Hodder.

"I don't seem to find a handkerchief in my drawer, Mrs. Hodder," he announced, standing in the doorway of the kitchen and glancing suggestively toward a basketful of unironed clothes below the table at which his housekeeper sat.

"You don't, Mr. Black?" Mrs. Hodder exclaimed. "Mercy me—I'll iron you one in a jiffy. If I may make so bold as to say so, sir, it's not my fault. You use handkerchiefs rather lavish for one who—who owns so few."

"Haven't I enough? I'll get some more at once. Do I—do you mind telling me if I look as if I were going out to dinner?"

The housekeeper turned and surveyed him. Approval lighted her previously sombre eye. "You look as if you were just going to get married," she observed.

An explosion of unclerical-like laughter answered her. "But I'm dressed no differently from the way I am on Sundays," he reminded her.

"You have your gown on in the pulpit. And the minute you come home you're out of that long coat and into the

short one. I've never seen you stay looking the way you do now five minutes, Mr. Black."

"That must be why I'm so unhappy now. I've got to stay in this coat for an entire evening. Pity me, Mrs. Hodder! And don't wait up, please. I may be rather late."

He marched away, followed by the adoring gaze of his housekeeper. Mrs. Hodder's austerity of countenance belied her softness of heart. If the minister had guessed how like a mother she felt toward him he might have been both touched and alarmed.

Arrived at the Lockharts', he found himself welcomed first by Tom, who met him, as if accidentally, at the very door.

"The heavy-weights are all here," announced the boy under his breath, his arm linked in Black's, as he led his friend upstairs. "Bald—half of 'em are bald! And the rest look as solemn as if this were a funeral instead of a dinner. Maybe they feel that way. I'm sure I do. I say—don't you wish we could jump into my car and burn it down the road about fifty miles into the moonlight? There's a gorgeous moon to-night."

"Ask me after the dinner is over, and I'll go."

"What? Will you? You won't—no such luck!"

"Try me and see."

"You bet I will. See here—you promise? It'll be late, I warn you. Father's dinners drag on till kingdom come."

"Any time before morning." And Black looked into the laughing, incredulous eyes of the youth before him.

"You're no minister," Tom chuckled. "You're a dead game sport." Then he drew back suddenly at the flash in the black eyes.

"Don't make a mistake about that," suggested Black, quietly.

"Oh—I guess you are a minister, all right," admitted Tom, respectfully. "And I guess perhaps I want you to be."

"I'm very sure you do." Black smiled again. "Did you think I couldn't take a late spin in your car without compromising my profession?"

"I just thought—for a minute," whispered the boy, "I saw a bit of a reckless devil look out of your eyes. I thought—you wanted to get away, like me, from this heavy dinner business—and go to—just any old place!"

"Perhaps I do. But I don't intend to think about moonlight drives till I've done my part here. Come on, Tom—let's be 'dead game sports' and help make things go. Afterward—we'll take the trail with good consciences."

"Anything to please you. I was going to bolt whenever R. P. Burns got called out; but I'll wait for you."

"You seem to be sure he'll be called out. Perhaps he won't, for once."

"Not a chance. Wait and see," prophesied Tom; and together they descended the stairs.

Tom stood off at one side, after that, with the apparent deference of youth. His eyes were sharp with interest in Black, whose presence relieved for him the tedium of the affair. He saw the minister shaking hands, making acquaintances, joining groups, with a certain straightforwardness of manner which pleased the critical youth immensely. Like most young men, he despised what is easily recognized in any company as that peculiar clerical atmosphere which surrounds so many men of Black's profession. He didn't want a minister to bow a little lower, hold the proffered hand a little longer, speak in a little

more unctuous tone than other men. He wanted his minister to hold his head high, to make no attempts to ingratiate himself into his companions' good graces by saying things too patently calculated to please them; he didn't want him to agree with everybody—he wanted him to differ with them healthily often. As he watched Black's way of looking a new acquaintance straight in the eye, as if to discover what manner of man he was, and then of letting the other man take the lead in conversation instead of instantly and skillfully assuming the lead, as if he considered himself a born dictator of the thoughts and words of others—well—Tom said to himself once more that he was jolly glad Robert McPherson Black had come to this parish. Since it always devolved upon the Lockhart family to show first friendliness to new incumbents of that parish, it mattered much to Tom that he could heartily like this man. He was even beginning to think of him as his friend—his special friend. And as, from time to time, his eyes met Black's across the room, he had a warm consciousness that Black had not forgotten but was looking forward to the hour that should release them both for that fast drive down the empty, moonlit road. Reward enough for a dull evening, that would be, to take the black-eyed Scotsman for such a whirl across country as he probably had never known!

But first—the dinner! And Red hadn't come—of course he hadn't—when the party moved out to the dining room and took their places at the big table with its impressive centrepiece of lights and flowers, its rather gorgeous layout of silver and glass, and its waiting attendants. Red hadn't arrived when the soup and fish had come and gone; when the roast fowl was served; it wasn't till Tom had begun to give him up that the big doctor

suddenly put his red head in at the door and stood there looking silently in upon the company. Tom sprang up joyfully, and rushed across the room. Red came forward, shook hands with his host, and took his place—opposite Black, as it happened.

And instantly—to two people at least—the room was another place. It's Stevenson, isn't it?—who mentions that phenomenon we have all so many times observed—that the entrance of some certain person into a room makes it seem "as if another candle had been lighted!" Wonderful phrase that—and blessed people of whom it can be said! Of such people, certainly R. P. Burns, M. D., was a remarkable type. Nobody like him for turning on not only one but fifty candlepower.

Yet all he did was to sit down—in his customary gray suit, quite as Tom had said he would, having had no time to change—grin round the table, and say, "Going to feed me up from the beginning, Lockhart? Oh, never mind. A good plateful of whatever fowl you've had, and a cup of coffee will suit me down to the ground. Coffee not served yet, Parker?" He turned to the manservant at his elbow. "But you see"— with an appealing glance at his host—"I've had no lunch to-day—and it's nearly ten. I'm just about ready for that coffee." Then he surveyed again the hitherto serious gentlemen about him, who were now looking suddenly genial, and remarked, "You fellows don't know what it is to be hungry. No one here but me has done an honest day's work."

"Do you mind telling us what time yours began, Doctor Burns?" asked Black, across the table.

The hazel eyes encountered the black ones for the second time. Black had been the first man Red looked at as he sat down—his greeting grin had therefore started with Black.

"Twelve-five A. M. No thanks to me. I gave the fellow blue blazes for calling me, but he was one of those persistent chaps, and rang me up every ten minutes till I gave in and went . . . Excuse the shop. . . . What were you all talking about? Keep it up, please, while I employ myself."

Somebody told him they had been talking about the Great War in Europe—and received a quick, rather cynical glance from the hazel eyes. Somebody else observed that it was to be hoped we'd keep our heads and not get into it—and had a fiery glance shot at him, decidedly disdainful. Then a third man said sadly that he had a son who was giving him trouble, wanting to go and enlist with the Canadians, and he wished he knew how to talk sense into the boy.

"Better thank the Lord you've bred such a lad!" ejaculated Red, between two gulps of coffee.

"Of course I am proud of his spirit," admitted the unhappy father. "But there's no possible reason why he should do such a wild thing. His mother is nearly out of her mind with fear that if we keep on opposing him he'll run away."

"If he does, you'll wish you had sent him willingly, won't you?" suggested Black. "Why not let him go?"

William Jennings, treasurer of Black's church, turned on his minister an astonished eye. "You don't mean to say *you* say that?"

"Why not? I have three young nephews over there, in the Scottish ranks. They need all the help they can have from us. If we don't get in as a country pretty soon now—more than your boy will run away. Look at the fellows who've already gone from our colleges, and more going all the time."

"Mr. Black,"—a solemn voice spoke from down the table—"I've been given to understand you are in sympathy with war. I can hardly believe it."

Black looked at the speaker, and his eyes sparkled with a sudden fire. "That's rather a strange way of putting it," he said. "Perhaps you might rather say I am in sympathy with those who have had war thrust upon them. What else is there to do but to make war back—to end it?"

"There are other ways—there must be. A great Christian nation must use those ways—not throw itself blindly into the horrible carnage. Our part is to teach the world the lesson of peace as Christ did."

"How did He teach it?" The question came back, like a shot.

The man who had spoken delayed a little, finding it difficult to formulate his answer. "Why, by His life, His example, His precepts——" he said. "He was the Man of Peace—He told us to turn the other cheek——"

Red's keen eyes were on Black now. He had opened his own lips, in his own impulsive way—and had closed them as quickly. "What's in you?" his eyes said to Black. "Have you got it in you to down this fool? Or must I?" And he forgot how hungry he was.

When Black spoke, every other eye was on him as well. He spoke quietly enough, yet his words rang with conviction. "My Christ," he said, "if He were on earth now, and the enemy were threatening Mary, His mother, or the other Mary, or the little children He had called to Him, would seize the sword in His own hand, to defend them."

Red sat back. Over his face swept a flame of relief. Tom breathed quickly. Samuel Lockhart glanced about

him, and saw on some faces startled approval and on others astonishment and anger.

Then the talk raged—of course. This was in those days, already difficult to recall, when men differed about the part America should take in the conflict; when dread of involvement called forth strange arguments, unsound logic; when personal fear for their sons made fathers stultify themselves by advocating a course which should keep the boys out of danger. Several of the guests at Mr. Lockhart's table were fathers of sons in college—substantial business or professional men alive with fear that the war sentiment flaming at the great centres of education would catch the tow and tinder of the young men's imagination, and that before long, whether America should declare war or not, instead of isolated enlistments the whole flower of the country's youth would be off for the scene of the great disaster.

Suddenly Red brought his fist down on the table.

"You're afraid," he cried, "of the personal issue, you fellows! Forget that you have sons—let the sons forget that they have fathers. What's America's plain duty? Good God—it's as plain as a pikestaff! She's got to get in—to keep her own self-respect."

"And to save her own soul," added Black; and again the eyes of the two men met across the table.

It was at this instant that Tom Lockhart took fire. Up to these last words of Red and Black he had been merely intensely interested and excited; now, suddenly, he was aglow with eagerness to show where he stood, he of the class who in all wars are first to offer themselves. Almost before he knew it he had spoken, breaking the silence which had succeeded upon Black's grave words.

"I'm ready to go," he said, and a great flush spread over his fair young face to the roots of his thick, sandy hair.

Then, indeed, the table was in an uproar—a subdued uproar, to be sure, but none the less throbbing with contrary opinion. As for Samuel Lockhart himself, he could only stare incredulously at his boy, but the other men, with the exception of the doctor and the minister, were instantly upon Tom with hurried words of disapproval. William Jennings, who sat next him, turned and laid a remonstrating hand on Tom's arm.

"My boy," he said, fiercely—it was he whose son was likely to enlist with Canada—"you don't know what you're talking about. For Heaven's sake, don't lose your head like my George! There isn't any call for you youngsters to take this thing seriously—leave it to the ones who are of military age, at least. They've got enough men over there, anyway, to see this war through; if we send money and munitions, the way we are doing, that's our part, and a big part it is, too."

Well, Tom found himself wishing in a way that he hadn't spoken up, since it had brought all the heavyweights down on his undeniably boyish self. And yet, somehow, when he had glanced just once at Red and Black, he couldn't be entirely sorry. Both had given him a look which he would have done much to earn, and neither had said a word of remonstrance.

Yet, after the dinner, his impression that they were both eager to have him carry his expression of willingness into that of a fixed purpose, suffered an unexpected change. As they rose from the table, at a late hour, Red—who had not been called out yet after all—slipped his arm through Tom's, and spoke in his ear.

"I'm proud of you, lad," he said, "but I want you to

think this thing through to the end. Duty sometimes takes one form and sometimes another. I've been watching your father, and—you see—you dealt him a pretty heavy blow to-night, and he hasn't been quite the same man since. Go slow—that's only fair to him. You're not twenty-one yet, are you?"

"Pretty near. Next January."

"Keep cool till then. We may be in it as a country by then—I hope so. If we are—perhaps you and I——"

Tom thrilled. "Will you go, Doctor?"

"You bet I will! I'd have been off long ago if—— But I can't tell you the reason just now. Some day, perhaps. Meanwhile——"

He looked at Tom, and Tom looked at him. Then, both of them, for some unexplainable reason, turned and looked toward Black, whose eyes were following them.

"Do you suppose he'll go if we do declare war?" whispered Tom.

A queer expression crossed Red's face. "They mostly don't—his class," he said, rather contemptuously.

"Do you think—" Tom hesitated—"he's—just like his class?"

"Not—just like those I've known," admitted Red, grudgingly. "That is—on the surface. Can't tell how deep the difference goes, yet."

"I *like* him!" avowed Tom, honestly.

Red laughed. "Good for you!" he commented. "I'm —trying rather hard not to like him."

Tom stared. "Oh—why not?" he questioned, eagerly.

But he didn't hear the explanation of this extraordinary statement, for one of the older men came up and hauled him away by the arm, and he had a bad time of it, mostly, for the rest of the evening. He was only restrained from

making a bolt and getting away from the house by the remembrance of Black's promise.

The time came, however, when for a moment he feared it was all up with that moonlight spin. He had just slipped out upon the porch and assured himself that the night was continuing to be the finest ever, when he heard Red inside taking leave. He hurried back, and discovered that the other men were evidently about to take the cue and go also. He came around to Black's elbow in time to hear Red address the minister.

"Happen to be in the mood for a run of a few miles in my car?" Red invited, in his careless way which left a man free to accept or refuse as he chose. "I have to see a patient yet to-night. It was a pretty fine night when I came in."

Tom couldn't know—how could he?—what, in the circumstances, it cost Black to reply as he promptly did:

"Thank you—I'd like nothing better—except what I'm going to have: the same thing with Tom Lockhart."

Now Tom was a gentleman, and he hastened to release Black from his promise, though his face plainly showed his disappointment.

"Please go with the Doctor, if you like, Mr. Black. His car can put it all over mine—and he doesn't ask anybody very often—as I happen to know."

Black smiled. "I'm engaged to you, Tom," he said, "and I'm going with you, if you'll take me. Mighty sorry I can't be in two places at the same time, Doctor Burns."

"All right," answered Red—and wouldn't have admitted for a farm that he was disappointed. "As for Tom's car—it's a whale," he added, "and can show my old Faithful the dust any time. Good-night, then!"

Whichever was the better car, certain it was that Black,

in Tom's, had his first sensation of tremendous speed during the hour which followed. The boy was excited by the events of the evening, he was a skillful and daring driver, and he was conscious of being able to give an older man a perfectly new experience. Black had frankly told him that he had never before taken a night drive in a powerful roadster, with the speed limit whatever the driver chose to make it. Under this stimulus Tom chose to make it pretty nearly the extreme of his expensive motor's power. The result was that very soon the minister's hat was in his hand, and his close-cut black hair taking the stiff breeze, like Tom's, as the car gathered herself afresh to fly down each new stretch of clear road.

"Like it?" shouted Tom, suddenly, as he slowed down for a sharp curve.

"It's great!"

"Don't mind how fast we go?"

"Not while I trust you—as I do."

"You do trust me, eh?" The boy's voice was exultant.

"To the limit."

"Why do you?"

"Because you know my life is in your hands. You wouldn't risk cutting it short."

The motor slackened perceptibly. "There's not the least danger of that."

"Of course not—with your hands on the wheel. Go ahead—don't slow down. You haven't shown me yet quite what the car can do, have you?"

"Well—not quite. Pretty near, though. I knew you were a good sport. Lots of older men get nervous when we hit—what we were hitting. Not even R. P. B. drives in quite that notch—and he's no coward. He says it's all right, if you don't happen to throw a tire. I never

expect to throw one—not at that pace. Never have. Maybe I better not take any chances with the minister in, though."

"Take any that you'd take for yourself," commanded Black. Tom, diminishing his pace of necessity for a one-way bridge, glanced quickly round at his companion, to see what Black's face might reveal that his cool speech did not. He saw no trace of fear in the clean-cut profile outlined against the almost daylight of the vivid night; instead he saw a man seemingly at ease under conditions which usually, Tom reflected, rather strung most fellows up, old or young.

Suddenly Tom spoke his mind: "You *are* a good sport," he said, in his ardent young way. "They mostly aren't, though, in your business, are they?—honestly now? *You* would go to war, though, wouldn't you?"

Then he saw a change of expression indeed. Black's lips tightened, his chin seemed to protrude more than usual—and, as we have stated before, it was a frankly aggressive chin at any time. Black's head came round, and his eyes seemed to look straight through Tom's into his cynical young thoughts.

"Tom," he said—waited a bit, and then went on, slowly and with peculiar emphasis—"there's just one thing I can never take peaceably from any man—and I don't think I have to take it. I have the honour to belong to a profession which includes thousands of the finest men in the world—just as your friend Doctor Burns' profession includes thousands of fine men. You—and others—never think of hitting at the profession of medicine and surgery just because you may happen to know a man here and there who isn't a particularly worthy member of it. There are quacks and charlatans in medicine—but the

profession isn't judged by them. Is it quite fair to judge the ministry by some man you have known who didn't seem to measure up?"

"Why—no, of course not," admitted Tom. "It's just that—I suppose—well—I don't think there are so many of 'em who—who——"

"Want to drive seventy miles an hour—at midnight?"

Tom laughed boyishly. "I don't expect that, of course. But I don't like long prayers, to tell the truth; and most of the sermons find fault with folks because they don't happen to come up to the preacher's mark, and I get fed up on 'em."

"Do you like Doctor Burns' medicine? He set your leg once, you told me. Did you like that—especially?"

"Oh, well—if you want to call sermons medicine——" began Tom, slyly.

"That's exactly what many of them are—or should be—and pretty bitter medicine, too, at that, sometimes. Shouldn't a man have your respect who dares to risk your dislike by giving you the medicine he thinks you need? Is the man who ventures to stand up and tell you the plain truth about yourself, whether you like it or not, exactly a coward?"

"You're certainly no coward," said Tom, with emphasis.

"Did you ever happen to know a minister who you thought was a coward?"

"Not exactly. But—if you want the truth—I don't think, if this country should get into war, you'd see an awful lot of preachers going into it. Why—they don't believe in it. They——"

"Wait and see. We shall get into it—sooner or later—I hope sooner. And when we do—I don't think the regiments will be lacking chaplains."

"Oh!—chaplains!"

"You think that's a soft job, do you? Do you happen to have been reading much about the English and French chaplains over there, since the war began? And the priests?"

"Can't say I have," admitted Tom.

"The only difference that I can find," said Black, in a peculiar quiet tone which when he knew him better Tom discovered to mean deadly earnestness—with a bite in it—"between a chaplain's job and a fighting man's, is that the right sort of chaplain goes unarmed where the soldier goes armed—and takes about as many chances, first and last. And when it comes to bracing the men's courage before the fight—and after—well, I think I covet the chaplain's chance even more than I do the captain's."

They drove in silence after that for exactly three and three quarter miles, which, at Tom's now modified pace, took about five minutes. Then Black said:

"I didn't answer the other part of your question, did I, Tom?"

"About whether you'd go to war?" Tom turned, with a satisfied smile on his lips. "I've been thinking about that. But I guess you answered it, all right."

At one o'clock in the morning Tom set Black down before the manse. For the last half-hour they had had a jolly talk which had ranged from guns to girls—and back again to guns. Black seemed to know more about the guns than the girls, though he had listened with interest to Tom's remarks upon both subjects, and had contributed an anecdote or two which had made Tom shout with glee. When Black stood upon the sidewalk, a tall, straight figure in the moonlight, he held out his hand, which Tom gripped eagerly.

"Thank you for the best hour I've had in a month. That blew all the fog out of my brain, and put a wonderful new idea into my head."

"Mind telling me what it is?" Tom asked.

"If you'll keep it quiet till I have it under way. Do you think we can get a group of fellows, friends of yours and others, to come to my house once a week—say on Monday evenings—to talk over this war situation—study it up—discuss it freely—and plan what we can do about it, over here—before we get over there?"

"Do I think so?" Tom's tone spoke his pleasure as well as the chuckling laugh he gave. "Do I think so? Why, the fellows will be crazy to come—after I tell 'em about this drive and chin of ours. When they know you burned the road with me at such a clip and never turned a hair, they'll fall over one another to get to your house."

He enjoyed to the full the laugh he got back from Black at that—a deep-keyed, whole-souled, delightful laugh, which told of the richness of the man's nature. Then—

"I'd drive at a hundred, hours on end," declared Black, "to have you fall in with my schemes like that. Good-night, Tom, and we'll organize that club to-morrow."

"To-day, you mean." Tom reluctantly gave his motor the signal.

"To-day. At eight o'clock to-night. Be on hand early, will you, Tom—to help me make things go from the start?"

"I'll be sitting on your doorstep at seven thirty."

"Good. I'll open the door at seven twenty-nine. Good-night, Tom."

"Good-night, Mr. Black."

But so slowly did Tom drive away that he was not out of sight of the manse when the door closed on his friend the minister.

CHAPTER VI

HIGH LIGHTS

"THERE!" said Jane Ray, turning on one last golden electric bulb cunningly concealed. "I've used every device I know to make the showing tell. *Is* it effective? *Does* it all count, Mrs. Burns? I've studied it so much I don't know any more."

Mrs. Redfield Pepper Burns stood beside Miss Ray at one end of the long shop—a shop no longer—and looked down it silently for a full minute before she spoke. Then:

"It's very wonderful," she said, in her low, pleasant voice. "I shouldn't have dreamed that even you could do it. It *is* effective—it *does* count. The appeal, even at the first glance, is—astonishing."

"The question is—where has the shop gone?"

This was Miss Lockhart, who was on Mrs. Burns' other side. All three were in semi-evening dress of a quiet sort; and the evening hour was just before that set for the showing of the posters. Jane Ray had decided against making a public thing of her exhibition; she had argued that that would mean a large crowd and little money. A more exclusive affair, with invitations discreetly extended, ought to fill just comfortably her limited space, and bring the dollars she coveted for her Belgians.

"It isn't a shop now—it's a salon," declared Mrs. Burns. Jane glowed at this—as well she might. Mrs. Burns,

with her wealth, her experience of the world, her personality of exceeding charm, knew whereof she spoke. Jane knew well that she could not have found a patroness of her exhibition whose influence could help her more than that of the wife of Red Pepper Burns.

"Yes, that's the word," Nan agreed. "Miss Ray has done wonders. The shop has always been a perfectly charming place—as a shop; but to-night it's a colourful spot to solicit not only the eye but the heart. The pocket-books and purses will fly open—I'm sure of it. And with Doctor Burns to tell us what we *must* do—— Oh, no doubt but every poster will be sold to-night."

"I'm not so sure," Jane said. "They might be, if the prices bid run low. But I don't want small prices—I want big ones—oh, very big! If people will only understand—and care."

The shop door opened, and R. P. Burns and Tom Lockhart came in together, both in evening dress. Tom's face was exultant.

"I got him!" he called. "I put out the office lights, chloroformed the office nurse, hauled him upstairs, drew his bath, and put his clothes upon him—and for a finishing touch, to make all tight, disconnected the telephone. First occasion ever known where he was present at any party before the guests arrived—not to mention being properly dressed!"

Red was laughing. He loomed above the group, every shining red hair in place, his eyes sparkling with eagerness for the fray. Not in a long time had he had a part to play, outside his profession, which suited him so well. Himself war mad from the beginning, impatient a thousand times over at the apathy of his fellow-citizens under the constantly growing needs and demands of the world struggle,

he was welcoming the chance to try his hand and voice at warming the cold hearts, firing the imaginations, and reaching the pocket-books thus far mostly shoved deep down in the prosperous pockets. To be here to-night he had worked like a fiend all day to cover his lists of calls, to tie up every possible foreseen demand. At the last moment he had cut half a dozen strings which threatened to bind him, instructed his office to take no calls for him for the coming three hours, and had fled away with Tom, determined for once to do his duty as he saw it, and not as any persistent patient might see it.

"Jolly, but this is a stunning show!" he commented, gazing round him. "What lighting! Why, you must have run wires everywhere, Jane! That fellow in blue on the horse, at the far end, looks as if he were galloping straight out at us. You must have been on a hanging committee at some art gallery some time or other."

"Never. And Mr. Black is responsible for the first inspiration about the lighting. He has taken such an interest. Did you know he got all these Raemakers cartoons down at the end for me? They just came to-day—he had to wire and wire to have them here in time. They're so splendid—and so terrible—I've put them all by themselves."

Red strode down the room. Nobody joined him while he stared with intense concentration at the merciless arraignment of a merciless foe which was in each Raemakers stroke. He came back with a fresh fire in his eye.

"What can I say that will sell those? People will turn away in holy horror, and say the Dutchman lies. He hasn't told half the truth—it can't be told. I want that one last on the line myself. I can't hang it, but I can put it away—and get it out, now and then, when my pity

slackens. Oh, Lord—how long! Two years and more those people have been bleeding, and still we stand on the outside and look on, like gamins at a curbstone fight! Shame on us!" And Red ran his hand through his thick, coppery locks again and again, till they stood on end above his frowning brows.

"Hush, dear! Here come the first people—and you are one of the receiving hosts. You mustn't look so savage. Smooth down your hair—and smile again!" His wife spoke warningly.

"All right—I'll try. Where's the minister? I thought he was going to stand by to-night? He has a better grip on his feelings than I have. He keeps his hair where it belongs. I'm too Irish for that."

"I'm here." And Black came up to shake hands, ahead of the guests who were alighting from a big car outside. "I was after just one more poster—and got it out of the express office at the last minute. No, I'm not going to show it yet. I think it comes later."

"Now we're all six here—I'm so glad," whispered Nan Lockhart. "Do you know, somehow, I was never so proud in my life of being one of a receiving group. Nothing ever seemed so worth while. Mr. Black, it's fine of you to give so much time to this."

"Fine! It's just an escape valve for me, Miss Lockhart. Besides, what could be better worth doing than this, just now?"

"Nothing that I can think of. But it took Jane Ray to conceive it. Isn't she looking beautifully distinguished to-night, in that perfectly ripping smoke-blue gown, and her hair so shiningly smooth and close?"

"Ripping?" repeated Black, his eyes following Miss Ray as she went forward to welcome her first guests. "It's

very plain—and unobtrusive. I shouldn't have noticed it. She does look distinguished, as you say, but it isn't the dress, is it?"

Nan laughed. "How that would please her! The dress *is* plain and unobtrusive—and absolutely perfect in every line! It makes what I'm wearing look so fussy I want to go home and change it! Jane has a genius for knowing how to look like a picture. I suppose that's the artist in her. Do you know, I think the people who are asked here to-night feel particularly flattered by an invitation from Jane? Isn't that quite an achievement—for a shopkeeper?"

"That word doesn't seem to apply to her, somehow," said Black, and changed the subject rather abruptly. Two minutes later he had left Miss Lockhart, to greet one of his elderly parishioners, a rich widow who bore down upon him in full sail. Nan Lockhart looked after him with an amused expression about her well-cut mouth.

"You didn't like my calling her a shopkeeper. And you don't intend to discuss any girl with me or anybody else, do you, Mr. Black?" she said to herself. "All right—be discreet, like the saint you are supposed to be—and really are, for the most part, I think. But you're pretty human, too. And Fanny Fitch *is* wearing a frock and hat to-night that I think even you will be forced to notice."

It was not long before she had an opportunity to test the truth of this prediction. The room filled rapidly, the narrow street outside becoming choked with cars. Among the early comers were Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Lockhart and Miss Fitch. As Fanny appeared in the ever lengthening line of arrivals, Nan found herself waiting with interest for the moment when she should reach Jane Ray

and Robert Black, who, as it chanced just then, stood near each other.

No doubt but Miss Fitch was a charmer. Even Nan was forced to admit that she had never seen Fanny more radiant. As she glanced from Fanny to Jane and back again the comparison which occurred to her was that between a gray-blue pigeon and a bird of Paradise! And yet—there was nothing dull about Jane—and nothing flaunting about Fanny. It was not a matter of clothes and colour after all, it was an affair of personality. Jane *was* beautifully distinguished in appearance—Nan had chosen the right words to describe her—and Fanny was exquisitely lovely to look at. And there you were—simply nowhere in estimating the two, unless you had something more to go by than looks. Nan, with intimate knowledge of Fanny Fitch and an acquaintance with Jane Ray which offered one of the most interesting attractions she had ever felt toward a member of her own sex, found herself wondering how any man who should chance on this evening to meet them both for the first time might succeed in characterizing them, afterward, for the benefit, say, of an invalid mother!

It was great fun, and as good as a play, she reflected, to see Jane and Fanny meet. If there was the slightest touch of condescension in Fanny's manner as she approached her hostess, it had no choice but to disappear before Jane's adorable poise. Nobody could condescend to Jane. It wasn't that she didn't permit it—it simply couldn't exist in the presence of that straightforward young individuality of hers. From the top of her satiny smooth, high-held, dark head, to the toe of the smart little slipper which matched the blue of her gown, she was quietly sure of herself. And beside her some of the town's

most aristocratic matrons and maids looked decidedly less the aristocrat than Jane!

Around the edges of the room moved the guests, in low-voiced smiling orderliness, scanning the posters, large and small, so cunningly displayed, with every art of concealed lighting to show them off. The appeal of some was only in the flaming patriotism of the vigorous lines and brilliant colouring; in others all the cunning of the painter's brush had wrought to produce a restrained yet thrilling effect hardly second to that of a finished picture. The subjects were taken from everywhere; from the trenches, from No Man's Land, from civilian homes, from the cellars of the outcasts and exiles. And as the people whom Jane had invited to this strange exhibit moved on and on, past one heart-stirring sketch to another, the smiles on many lips died out, and now and then one saw more than a hint of rising tears quickly suppressed. Those who could look at that showing, unmoved, were few.

And yet, presently when Burns was upon his platform, offering his first poster for sale, though it went quickly, it was at no high price. Following this, he took the least appealing; and so on, in due course, and the bids still ran low. Little by little, however, he forced them up—considerably more by the tell-tale expression upon his face, when he was dissatisfied with a bid, than by what he said. As an auctioneer, Red had begun his effort a little disappointingly to those who expected his words, backed by his personality, to do great things from the start. The explanation he gave to Jane Ray, in a minute's interval, was undoubtedly the true one.

"If they were all men, I could bully them into it. Somehow, these well-dressed women stifle me. I'm not used

to facing them, except professionally. What's the matter? Shall I let go and fire straight, at any risk of offending? They ought to be offering five times as much, you know. They simply aren't taking this thing seriously, and I don't know how to make them."

"If you can't make them, I don't know who could. Yes, speak plainly—why not? We ought not to be getting tens and twenties for such posters as those last three—each one should have brought a hundred at least. Try this one next, please."

Burns stood straight again. He held up the sheet Jane offered him. It was a bit of wonderful colouring, showing a group of French peasants staring up at an airplane high overhead—the first British flier on his way to the Front. The awe, the faith in those watching eyes, was touching.

"Give me a hundred for this, won't you?" he called. "Start the bid at that, and then send it flying. Never mind whether you want the poster or not. Some day it will be valuable—if not in money, then in sentiment. Now, then, who speaks?"

Nobody spoke. Then: "Oh, come, Doctor," said one rotund gentleman, laughing, "you can't rob us that way. The thing's a cheap, machine-coloured print—interesting, certainly, but no more. I'll give you ten for it—that's enough. There's just one poster in the whole show that's worth a hundred dollars—and that's the man on the horse. When you offer that I'll be prepared to see you."

"The man on the horse goes for not a cent under five hundred," declared Burns, fiercely. "Starts at that—and ends at seven—eight—nine—a thousand! Meanwhile——"

But he couldn't do it. It was a polite, suburban company, no great wealth in it, just comfortably prosperous

people, not particularly patriotic as yet. The time was to come when they would see things differently, but at that period of the Great War they were mostly cold to the needs of the sufferers three thousand miles away. They saw no reason why Jane Ray should invite them to an exclusive showing of her really quite entertaining collection, and then expect them to open their pocket-books into her lap. Each one intended to buy one poster, of course, out of courtesy to Jane, but—the lower priced the better. And all the lower-priced ones were sold. The bidding went slack, all but died. Burns took out his big white handkerchief and wiped his brow, smiling ruefully down at Jane, who nodded encouragingly back. But even that encouraging nod couldn't tell Red how to do it.

Before this distressing stage in the proceedings had been reached, Black, with a lightning-like working of the mind, had been making plans of his own in case they should be needed. He had stood beside Nan Lockhart, at the back of the room, his arms folded, his eyes watching closely the scene before him. He did not look at all, as he stood there, like a man who could take an auctioneer's place and "get away with it," as the modern expressive phrase goes. In his clerical dress, his dark hair very smooth above his clear brow, his eyes intent, his lips unconsciously pressed rather firmly together under the influence of his anxiety for Burns' success in the difficult task, Black's appearance suggested rather that of a restrained onlooker at a race who watches a favourite jockey, than that of one who longs to leap into the saddle and dash round the course himself, to win the race. But this was precisely what he was aching to do.

Deeply as he admired the clever surgeon, much as he hoped for the friendship of the highly intelligent man,

he was not long in finding out that Red had not been built for a persuader in public places. If the red-headed doctor had been confronted with a desperate case of emergency surgery, he could have flung off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, commandeered an amateur nurse for an assistant, and achieved a victory as brilliant as it was spectacular. Doubtless, Black reflected, if it had been a matter of partisan politics, and an enemy to the good of the state had met Red in open debate, the doctor could have downed him in three rounds by sheer force of clean-cut argument and an arm thrown high in convincing gesture. But—given a roomful of well-to-do people, not overmuch interested in Belgian orphans, and a man trying to sell them something they didn't want for more than they had any idea of paying for it—well—Red simply couldn't do it, that was all. And Miss Ray, in picking him out for the job on account of his popularity and his well-known fearlessness in telling people what they must do—Miss Ray had simply missed it, that was all. It was an error in judgment, and nobody was seeing that more clearly than Jane herself, as Black discovered by each glance at her.

She was standing at Red's elbow, handing him up posters one by one, and giving the buyer a charming glance of gratitude for each purchase as she moved forward to hand the poster spoken for. But her usually warm colour had receded a little, her lips, between the smiles, seemed a trifle set, and a peculiar sense of her disappointment reached across the room and impressed itself upon Black as definitely as if she had signalled to him. Just once he caught her eyes, as if in search of his, and he found himself giving her back a look of sympathy and understanding. He was longing to come to her aid. Would it be possible, in any way, to do that? He was ac-

customed to facing people, in the mass, as Red was not, and accustomed to handling them, to reading from their faces what would influence them; in plain words, to being master of them, and leading them whither they would not voluntarily go. Would the moment conceivably come when he could step into the breach and, without offending Red or seeming presumptuous, take his place?

At least he could be prepared. And as his mind worked, led by Red's very mistakes into seeing what might offset them, a suggestion suddenly shaped itself. Instantly he acted upon it. He beckoned Tom Lockhart, took him quietly aside into the half-lighted rear shop where the big antique pieces removed from the larger room to make space crowded one another unmercifully, and spoke under his breath:

"Tom, you have more nerve than any fellow I know. Around the corner, on Seventh Street, at the Du Bois's, there's a Belgian baby—came to-day. Please go and ask them for it, will you?—and hurry back. Tell them to pick it out of the cradle just as it is, wrap a shawl around it, and let you bring it here. They're French—they'll understand—I was there to-day. Quick!"

With a smothered whoop Tom was off, and Black returned to the larger room, remaining, however, near the door of the back shop. Ten minutes later an eager whisper through a crack of that door summoned him and he slipped out to find Tom gingerly holding a bundle from one end of which protruded a dark little head.

"Here he is—poor little cuss! He's about the most whipped looking specimen I ever saw. Think he'll sell a poster? He's sold one already—blamed if he hasn't—at the best price Tommy Boy can afford."

"Keep him quiet here for a bit, can you, Tom? I'll

come for him when I think his chance is ripe. Will he keep still?"

"Too used to shifting for himself not to keep still, I guess." Tom gazed pityingly into the thin little face with its big eyes regarding him steadily in the dim light of the outer room. "All right, I'll keep him quiet. But don't hold off the crisis too long. R. P.'s about at the end of his wind. First time in my life I ever saw Doctor in a corner, but he's sure in one now."

"He's done nobly; we just aren't educated up to the idea yet, that's all. Baby may not help out, but we'll try."

Black went back. Red turned and gave him a look as he came in which said, "I wish I were about a million miles away from here. How in thunder do you do it?" As if the thought were father to the demand he suddenly beckoned and spoke:

"Mr. Black, suppose you come up here and tell us about these last—and best—posters. My oratory has run out. I know you have one poster of your own you haven't shown—isn't it time for that now?"

Black smiled up at him—a friendly smile which answered: "I'd like nothing better than to help you out, old fellow!" But aloud he said: "Rather a telling one has just been brought in by Mr. Thomas Lockhart. With your permission I'll be glad to show it to everybody."

And with that he was out of the room and back again, and the baby—out of its wrappings, its thin, tiny frame, pinched face and claw-like hands showing with a dumb eloquence—was held cosily in the tall minister's left arm, and his right hand was gently smoothing back the curly black locks from the wistful little brow. He took one step upon the platform Red was about to vacate, and looked

down into the upturned faces. "Don't go yet, please, Doctor," he requested, in the other's ear. Reluctantly Burns waited, scanning the baby.

"There isn't anything I can say, ladies and gentlemen," Black began, very quietly, and looking back into the small face as he went on. "It's all said by this little chap. He's just been brought over to this country, with scores more, by the Committee for Belgian Relief. A kind-hearted French family near by have offered to care for him until a home can be found. The father of this family was at the pier when the ship came in, saw this baby, and brought him home with him. It is for hundreds of such little forlorn creatures as he that Miss Ray wants to raise the largest sum we are able to give her. We can't conceive how much money is needed, but we can't possibly make the amount too large."

The absolute simplicity of this little speech—for this was all he said—coupled with the touching appeal of the baby in his arms, was what did it; Mrs. Burns and Nan and Jane all said so afterward. With the instinct for the right course at the right moment which is the peculiar gift of the public speaker, Black divined, at the instant that he came upon the platform, that the fewer his words the more loudly would the tiny, silent figure do its own soliciting. And so it proved.

"Please show the Belgian posters, Doctor Burns," Black suggested, and Red, taking them from Jane's hands, held them up one by one without comment. And one by one they were bid off, while Black stood and held the baby and looked on, his eyes eloquent of his interest. Bid off at sums which ranged higher and higher, as the company, now as ardent in the cause of the living, breathing baby before them as they had been apathetic in that of his

small compatriots across the sea of whom they had only heard, vied with each other to prove that they could be generous when they really saw the reason why.

"I'd certainly like a picture of Mr. Black and that baby at this minute," murmured Fanny Fitch in the ear of Nan Lockhart, as she returned from a trip to the front of the room, where she had recklessly emptied a gold mesh-bag to buy that for which she did not care at all. She had looked up into Robert Black's face as she stood below him, and had received one of those strictly impartial smiles which he was now bestowing upon everybody who asked for them; and she had come away thoroughly determined to secure for herself, before much more time had passed, a smile which should be purely personal.

"He does look dear with the baby," admitted Nan, heartily. "He holds him as if he had held babies all his life. Oh, it's splendid, the way things are going now. How *was* he inspired to get that child?"

"Eye for the dramatic, my dear," suggested her friend. "All successful ministers have it. The unsuccessful ones lack it, and go around wondering why their schemes fail. It's perfectly legitimate—and it makes them much more interesting. The Reverend Robert looks as innocent as the child in his arms, but he's really a born actor."

"Fanny Fitch! How ridiculous!"

"If he weren't he would have rushed up there with the baby and harangued us for fifteen minutes about the needs of the Belgians. But he has the dramatic sense just to stand there looking like a young father angel, with those dark brows of his bent on the poor child, and we fall for him like the idiots we are—as he knew we would. I never dreamed of spending that last ten dollars. I didn't spend it for the Belgians at all. I spent it for Robert Black!"

"I'm glad you're frank enough to admit it."

"What's the use in trying to conceal anything from you, Sharp Eyes?" And Miss Fitch returned to her occupation of observing the events now transpiring up in front, with a pair of lustrous eyes which missed no detail.

Jane's receptacle for the money handed her was nearly full now. It was a beautiful big bowl of Sheffield plate, one of the best in her collection, and it had called forth much admiring comment. Red sold his last poster—not all were for sale. This last one was the great "man on the horse," galloping with sword upraised and mouth shouting—the most vivid and striking of all, though to the eye of the connoisseur worth far less than some of quieter and more subtle suggestion. It was promptly bid in by the rotund gentleman who had challenged Red half an hour before, and he named so high a figure that he had no contestants. He received his purchase with a large gesture of triumph and pleasure with himself, and Jane, accepting his check, written with a flourish, gave him the expression of gratitude he had coveted.

She took the baby from Black, then, saying: "Your poster—hasn't the time come? Won't you show it yourself, please?"

"I want to, if I may. But it's not for sale."

"Oh! Then we have all we are to get to-night."

"I'm not sure. Yes—I think we have all we are to get—to-night. But—perhaps we have something to give."

She didn't understand—how should she? She watched him go back to the little platform, its boards covered with a fine rug and its backing a piece of valuable French tapestry above which hung the French and Belgian flags. Jane had conceived this effective setting for her auctioneer, but it was none the less effective for the man who had

taken Burns' place. Standing there he slowly unrolled the poster, and the people before him ceased their buzzing talk to watch, for something in his face told them that here was that which they must not miss.

Ah, but this was an original! How had he procured it? It was a strip of canvas which Black unrolled and silently held up before the hundred pairs of gazing eyes. And as they looked, the last whisper gave way to a stillness which was its own commentary on and tribute to the story told by an artist who was somehow different from the rest.

The colouring of the picture—it was a poster like the others—was all rich blues and browns, with a hint of yellow and one gleam of white. The background was a dim huddle of ruins and battle smoke. Close in the foreground were two figures—a stalwart British soldier in khaki and steel hat supporting a wounded Frenchman in the "horizon blue" of the French army, his bare head bandaged and drooping upon his chest. These two figures alone were infinitely touching, but that which gave the picture its thrilling appeal was that at which the Briton, his hand at the salute, was gazing over the bent head of his comrade. And of that, at the extreme left of the picture, all that one saw was a rough wooden post, and upon it, nailed to it by the rigid feet, two still, naked limbs. A roadside Calvary—or the suggestion of it—that was all one saw. But the look in the saluting soldier's rugged face was one of awe—and adoration.

Black held the canvas for a long minute, his own grave face turned toward it. Not even Fanny Fitch, in her cynical young heart, could dare to accuse him of "acting" now. The silence over the room was breathless—it was the hush which tells its story unmistakably. Before it could be broken, Black lowered the canvas.

"That's all," he said. "It brought it home to me so powerfully what is happening 'over there'—I just wanted you to see it, too. That's where the gifts you have given to-night are going."

"Mr. Black—" It was Mr. Samuel Lockhart, speaking in a low voice from the front—"is that—to be bought?"

"It is mine, Mr. Lockhart. It is not for sale."

"It is wonderful," said the elder man, with reverence.

Black rolled the canvas, and crossing the room put it out of sight. When he came back a little crowd surrounded the Belgian baby, in Jane's arms.

The assemblage took its leave with apparent reluctance. In the suburban town there had been nothing just like this evening in the memory of the oldest present. Those who carried posters with them held them rather ostentatiously; those who had none were explaining, some of them, that they had not been able to secure the ones they wanted, but that they had been happy to contribute something to so worthy a fund.

"Quite unique, and certainly very delightfully managed," one stout matron said to Jane as she extended a cordial hand. "You had courage, my dear, to attempt this here. You must have raised more than you could have expected."

"I haven't counted it," Jane answered. "It's been a happy thing to try to do it—I'm very grateful to you all."

When the last had gone, except the five who had been her helpers, she sat down with the Sheffield bowl in her lap, and Red took his place beside her, to help her count. Tom, having run home with the baby, was back again, eagerly hanging over Red's shoulder as he put bills of the same denomination together, and sorted silver. The other three looked on, eagerly awaiting the result.

Red announced the sum total—it was a goodly sum, running well into the hundreds. He looked up at Black.

"Three fourths of that came in after you brought up that blamed little beggar," he said. "And the things you didn't say were what turned the trick! By George, you taught me a lesson to-night. Speech may be silver, but a silence like that of yours sure was golden. I didn't know any man of your profession understood it so well. Hanged if I don't keep my tongue between my teeth, after this!"

A burst of appreciatively skeptical laughter from those who knew him answered this. But Black, though he smiled too, answered soberly: "There's a time for everything. You plowed—and the baby harrowed, that was all. The Belgian fund reaps. I know we're all mighty happy about it."

When he left, a few minutes later, Jane Ray gave him the sort of handshake, with her firm young hand closing with his in full reciprocity, which one man gives to another.

"I can't thank you," she said. "It was wonderfully done. But—do you mind telling?—you must have held many babies!"

How Black himself laughed then, his head thrown back, his white teeth gleaming. "Being a woman, that's what you get out of it," he said. "Yes—I've held every one I could ever get hold of. I like them a bit bigger than that—a regular armful. Poor 'blamed little beggar'—as the Doctor called him! But he'll be an armful some day. We'll see to that."

"You bet we will," declared Tom, who had been lingering to get away with Black. "Night, Miss Ray. I'll be around in the morning to help you move things back.

Don't you touch a darned thing till I come. Promise! I say, aren't you grateful to me? I borrowed that baby, and brought him here, too. The attention I attracted was awful. I had about ten dozen street kids with me all the way. Maybe that wasn't just as useful a stunt as standing up and saying things, under the Belgian flag—eh?"

She sent him her most adorable look. "Mr. Tom, you're a trump. You have my deepest appreciation—and good-night!"

"I say," said Tom, a minute later, when they were well away, "I call her some girl. She's—she's—well, she's a regular fellow—and you know how I mean that, don't you?"

"Yes," replied Black, looking fixedly up the street, as if he saw there something which interested him very much. "I know how you mean that. I think you are—right. Tom, would you object to telling me what all those women meant about my holding that baby? How on earth did I hold it differently from the way any man would hold it?"

"Young Mrs. Germain told me," said Tom, chuckling with glee, "that you held it in your left arm. They said nobody except an old hand would do that. To have your right free to do other things—see? I never understood about that before. I carried the kid on my right arm."

"After this," declared Robert McPherson Black, firmly, "if I ever have occasion to hold an infant in public, I shall do it with *my* right arm!"

CHAPTER VII

RATHER A BIG THING

BLACK was standing in the vestibule of a train which was bringing him back, at a late hour, from the city where he had spent the day at a conference of clergymen. He was somewhat weary, for the day had been filled with long debate over a certain question which had seemed to him vital indeed but not debatable. He had not hesitated to say so, and had been delayed after the evening session was over by men who still wanted to talk it out interminably with him. He had missed his trolley and had therefore taken the train.

As the train drew in Black found himself crowded next a young man who seemed to be suffering from an excessive nervousness. He was tall and thin, rather handsome of face, but with eyes so deeply shadowed that they suggested extreme and recent illness. His manner was so shaky, as he went down the steps ahead of Black, and he set down his bag upon the platform with such a gesture of supreme fatigue, that Black stopped to find out if he were indeed ill, and if he needed help. At the same moment the stranger looked round at him, and put a question in a quick, breathless voice which indicated both anxiety and difficulty at self-control.

"Can you tell me," he jerked out, "where Miss Ray's shop is—antique shop—Jane Ray? I ought to know—forgotten the street."

Black hesitated. Send this unknown and unnatural young man to Jane at this late hour? He looked both dissipated and irresponsible, and Black thought he caught the odour of alcohol upon his breath.

"It's late. The shop will be closed," Black suggested. "Hadn't you better go to a hotel to-night, and look it up in the morning?"

The stranger frowned, and answered irritably—almost angrily:

"I should say not. Miss Ray's my sister. Will you tell me where the shop is, or have I got to find somebody who will?"

Black made a quick decision. "I'll show you the way. It's not far out of my course."

His eyes searched the stranger's face, to find there confirmation of the statement which otherwise he would not have been inclined to believe. The resemblance, taking into account the difference between Jane's look of vitality and radiant energy, and this young man's whole aspect of broken health and overwrought nerves, was very apparent. And as the stranger looked down the platform, and his profile was presented to Black's scrutiny, he saw that the same definite outlines of beauty and distinction were there, not to be mistaken. On this basis he could have no hesitation in guiding the markedly feeble footsteps to her door, though he was wondering, rather anxiously, just what his arrival, evidently unexpected by her, would mean to her. Black had never heard anybody mention her having a brother—he had understood she was quite alone in the world.

The two set out down the street. The young man walked so falteringly that after a minute Black took his well-worn leather bag away from him, saying

pleasantly: "Let me carry it. You're not quite fit, I'm sure."

The other glowered. "Not fit! What do you mean by that? I'm fit enough—I'm just worn out, that's all. Overwork—illness—nerves—I'm all in. But if you mean to imply——"

"I don't mean to imply anything, Mr. Ray—if that is your name. I can see you have been ill. Let me put my hand under your arm, won't you? I'd call a cab. if there were any to be had—I'm afraid there aren't."

"Don't want a cab—can walk. Walk faster, that's all. I'm liable to go to pieces pretty soon—haven't eaten a mouthful to-day—couldn't look at it. These confounded nerves——"

There was no doubt but his nerves were confounded, and badly, at that. As they walked the few squares necessary to get to Jane's little street, Black felt his companion becoming more and more desperately shaken in body and mind. Several times he said something which struck Black as all but irrational. More than once he would have wavered far away from the straight course if Black's arm had not held him steady. A policeman looked sharply at the pair as they passed under the light at a corner, and Black was aware that but one inference was likely—one he was not at all sure was untrue.

The shop was dark when they reached it, and Black rang the bell. Just as a light appeared, and he saw Jane coming through from her rooms in the rear, the stranger suddenly sank against Black's shoulder, and he was forced to drop the bag and hold him supported in both arms. So when Jane opened the door, it was to this singular and somewhat startling apparition.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Ray," said Black's quietly

assured voice. "He's only faint, I think. This is—your brother? He's been ill, and wasn't quite strong enough to make the journey. We'll get him lying down as fast as we can."

"Oh, Cary!" Jane was out of the door in an instant, and her strong young arm was around her brother from the opposite side. "Can you walk, dear?"

He hardly had to walk, so nearly did they carry him. They had him through the shop and into the little living room in no time at all, and Jane had run for a stimulant. The glass she held to his lips and the prostrate position revived him quickly. He made a wry face at the tumbler she had set down upon a table.

"Can't you do better than that?" he questioned, weakly. "For God's sake give me the real thing—I need it. I'm dying for it—yes, dying literally, if you want to know."

Jane shook her head. "No, dear—I haven't any—and I'm sure you don't need it. I'll make you some strong tea. Oh, I'm so glad you came, Cary!"

The young man seemed to try to smile—but the smile looked more like tears. He held up a shaking hand.

"Nerves—Jane—nerves. I'm all in—I'm a wreck. I'm——" His look wavered around at Black, who stood above and behind him. "We'll excuse you, sir," he said, with an effort at dignity. "I'm very much obliged to you—and now—please go!"

Jane looked up at Black with a face into which the quick and lovely colour poured in a flood. "My brother isn't himself," she said under her breath. "Do forgive him. I'm so grateful to you. I can get on with him nicely now."

"I can surely be of service to you yet, Miss Ray," Black said with decision. "Your brother needs care, and I can help you make him comfortable."

She shook her head. "I can do all he needs," she said, "and it's late. I can't——"

And then Cary Ray decided things for himself by sitting up and pointing with a shaking finger and a voice of fright toward a shadowy corner. "What's that!" he whispered. "What's that? You haven't got 'em here, too, have you? I thought *you* wouldn't have 'em—not *you!*"

There was nothing in the corner. Black laid young Ray gently but firmly down upon the couch again. "No, you're mistaken," he said quietly. "We haven't got them here—and we're not going to have them. Trust me for that—I know all about it."

Across the dark head, again fallen weakly upon the couch pillow, Black's eyes met Jane's. "Please let me stay awhile?" he urged.

She knew then that he knew, and that it was of no use to try to hide the pitiful, shameful thing from him. She nodded and turned away, and he saw her clench one hand tight as she went to Cary's bag and opened it. He saw her search through the bag, and take from it something which he did not see, because she went out of the room with it. She was gone some time. While she was away, he occupied himself with keeping Cary's attention from concentrating on that corner of which his suspicions became now and then acute.

When she returned, her brother was talking fast and disconnectedly.

"I haven't slept—" he was saying, in a tone that was half a wail—"I haven't slept for a week—haven't had a decent night's sleep in months. I—— How can you expect—I tell you a fellow can't keep going—work's all gone to pot——"

Jane came close to him. "You shall stay here and rest

up, Cary," she said gently, with her hand on his hot head. "And I'll feed you wonderfully and get you strong again. Could you take just a little something now?—A glass of milk—a tiny sandwich——"

He shook his head, with a gesture of distaste. "Don't say food to me—don't bring any in my sight. There's just one thing I want—and I know you won't give it to me. Jane—" he caught at her hand—"it would make me sleep, and God knows I need that—I shall die without it. I—that thing in the corner—oh, I didn't think it would track me here——"

"It isn't here. Forget it!" Black spoke sternly. "You're going to bed, and to sleep—I'm going to see to that. Miss Ray—you'll let me get your brother into his bed, won't you? Once there, I'll put him to sleep—I know I can—and that's what he needs more than anything."

"I'll go and make his room ready," said Jane Ray. She had to yield. She knew Cary needed a man's hand, a man's will. Strong and resourceful though she was, she understood that at this pass no woman could control the disordered nerves as a man could. She could only be thankful that she had this man at her service at this hour, though perhaps he was the last man she would have picked out, or have been willing to have know of her unhappy situation. But he knew it now, and somehow, as her eyes met his, she could not be quite sorry, after all, that it was he who was to help her. At least, whether he could deal with Cary or not, she could be absolutely sure that she could trust him. And this was not because of his profession—rather, to Jane, it was in spite of it.

So, presently, Black found himself putting Cary Ray to bed—in a room he didn't in the least deserve to have,

for it was unquestionably Jane's own. Every detail of its furnishing told him that, though he did not allow himself to study it much from this point of view. It was rather a large room, and as simply outfitted as could be imagined, and yet somehow its whole aspect gave the impression of character and charm. And Black had never in his life hated to see a man installed in a place which didn't belong to him as he hated to see Cary Ray made comfortable in this exquisitely chaste room of Jane's. Yet he couldn't very well protest. He knew as well as if he had been told that it was the only room of adequate size and comfort which she had to put at her brother's service, and that, since he was ill and in need, she wouldn't dream of tucking him up on a couch somewhere as a substitute. For one bad moment Black was astonished to discover that he was longing to pitch this dissipated young man out of the house, and tell his sister to keep her white sheets clean from his contaminated body.

But then, of course, he settled to his task, sternly putting such thoughts away from him. Having got Cary stretched between those same sheets, the lights extinguished—except that from an amber-shaded reading light beside the bed—instead of taking a chair he sat down on the foot of the bed in a friendly sort of way, and remarked in the most matter-of-fact tone in the world—"This reminds me of a night I spent once down in Virginia——" And from that he was off, by degrees, and not at all as if he had set himself to entertain his patient, into a recital that presently captured Cary's hitherto fitful attention and held it until the sense of strangeness in the whole situation had somewhat gone by for the invalid—if not for the nurse.

The night was not spent, however, in telling stories. It is true that Cary himself told one or two—and lurid

tales they were, with more than a suspicion of nightmare in them, the nightmare of drugs or of a disordered brain. There were intervals—though few of them—when the young man sank into a brief sleep, as if from profound exhaustion, but he invariably awoke with a start and a cry to a condition which became, as the hours went on, more and more difficult to control. Black did succeed in controlling it, by sheer force of will; he seemed to have a peculiar power to do this. His hand upon Cary's, his voice in his ear, and time and again the strained nerves and muscles would relax, and the crisis would pass. But more than once, so wild was the almost delirium of the sufferer, that it took all Black's physical strength to keep command.

Jane was there only a part of the time. It was during the periods of repose and half slumber that she would slip noiselessly into the room, stand watching her brother silently, or sit down upon the foot of the bed opposite Black, to look at the thin face on the pillow with her unhappy heart in her eyes. Black had never seen much of Jane's heart before; he couldn't help seeing something of it now. It was beyond his power to refrain, now and then, as the two sat in the hush of the night, so strangely thrown together in a situation which neither could ever have foreseen, from looking across at Jane's clear-cut profile in the subdued light, and studying it as if he had never seen it before. His pity for her grew as the hours went by, and with his pity a tenderness grew also, until, quite suddenly, he was startled by a consciousness that he wanted to go around to her and take her hands in his and tell her—that he would stand by her to the last limit of his power.

On one of her trips into the room, when Cary happened

to be quiet for a little, Jane whispered to Black that she would take his place and he must go downstairs and eat the lunch she had prepared for him. When he told her that he didn't need it she only pointed, quite imperiously, to the door, and he obediently left the room and went to do her bidding. It was as he was finishing the delicious viands he found on the table in the room below that his ear, alert for any signs of trouble above, caught the sinister sound he was listening for. He ran up, three steps at a time, to find Jane struggling in the grip of her half-crazed brother, who was demanding in language so profane that it seemed to burn the air, the instant production of the one thing in the world he wanted.

"You've got it—you're hiding it—you little fool! Do you want to see me dead before morning—you——" Then came the oaths, this time but half uttered before a strong, smothering hand descended upon the twisting mouth, and a stern voice said commandingly: "Not another word like that, Ray, or I'll choke you till you're still!" At the same moment a jerk of Black's head toward the door and his fiery glance at Jane told her that he wanted her out of the room and out of hearing as fast as she could get away.

It was a long tussle this time, but it was over at last, and once more, worn out by the violence of his own efforts, Cary lay quiet for a little. Confident that though not asleep he would not at once find strength to fight again, Black stole out of the room. In the narrow hall outside he found Jane, sitting on the top stair, her head buried in her arms.

Thus far he had known Jane only as a finely practical young business woman, as independent as she was capable. He had seen that adorable head of hers, with its smooth

crown of chestnut hair, always held high, with a suggestion of indomitable courage. Now—it looked as if it had been brought low—incredibly low. She had long before exchanged the dress in which she had spent the day in the shop for a plain white skirt and blouse such as nurses wear, and in this costume she looked much younger and more girlish than in the more conventional dress. Her white-shod feet were crossed as a girl crosses them; and altogether, in the dim light from the half-open door, she seemed to Black more like Cary's dependent young sister than one older than himself to whom he had come as to a refuge. He didn't know, as yet, that after all it was Cary who was the older.

At the sound of the light footstep, however, Jane instantly lifted her head, and then rose quickly to her feet, and he saw her smile—an undoubtedly forced little smile, but full of pluck.

"You must be desperately tired," she whispered. "But I don't know what I should have done without you this night."

"You couldn't have done without me. I can't tell you how glad I am to be here. And I'm not half as tired as you are. Won't you go now and lie down? You can't do a bit of good by staying on guard here, and you'll need your strength to-morrow. This isn't going to be a short siege, I'm afraid."

"I know it's not. But I've been through it all before. I shall call Doctor Burns to-morrow. I tried to to-night, so I could release you, but he was away for the night. And—I didn't want to call anybody else. Nobody else—here—knows, and—I can't have them know."

"Nobody knows you have a brother?"

"Oh, they've seen Cary—but only when he was—him-

self. He is—Cary is a genius, Mr. Black; he just has—the defects of his temperament. He—I can show you——"

And then, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, the tears leaped into her eyes. Like a small boy, abashed at having shown emotion, she threw back her head, smiling again, and drawing the back of her hand across the tell-tale eyes. "Oh, I'm ashamed of myself," she breathed. "Believe me, I'm not so weak as this looks."

"You're not in the least weak. And it's three o'clock in the morning, the hour when things take hold. See here——" And he looked her straight in the eyes. "Jane Ray," he said, not too gently, but as a man might say it to a man, though he spoke low, on account of that open door—"I want you to know that, whatever comes, I'll see you through. I won't add—'if you'll let me'—for you're going to let me. You can't help it—after to-night." And he held out his hand. "Shall we make a pledge of it?" he added, smiling gravely.

She looked straight back at him. "You can't—see me through," she said. "You—I've no claim on you. You have your church——"

"I have. Is that a reason why I can't stand by you? If it is—it's not the church I gave myself to. And—I think you need another brother. I'm sure Cary does." His hand was waiting. He looked down at it. "Are you going to make me take it back?" he asked. "That would—feel very strange. I didn't offer it—to take back."

She put her own into it then. He gave it a long, strong clasp and let it go. Without looking at him she turned and ran downstairs, and he went back into the room where Cary was beginning to stir restlessly again.

He was conscious, in every fibre, that something had

happened to him. He had not had the least idea, when he had begun his vigils that night, that before morning he should be thrilled as he never had been thrilled before, by a simple handclasp, and a few spoken words, offering only what he had offered many a man or woman in trouble before now, his sympathy and help. But somehow—this had been different. He was acutely aware that the wish to see Jane Ray through whatever difficulties and problems might lie before her in connection with this brother of hers was a mighty different sort of wish from any that he had experienced before. And the fact that she had tacitly accepted his help—proud Jane—for he knew she was proud—gave him a satisfaction out of all proportion to any ordinary significance attached to so obvious and natural a suggestion. There was now a bond between them—that was the thing that took hold of him; a bond which made possible—well, what did it make possible? What did he want it to make possible? He didn't try to go into that. One thing was sure: he had, by an accident, come into her life in a way he had never dreamed of, and once in—he wanted to stay. This touch of intimate comradeship had been something new in his experience. It might never happen again; certainly he could not continue to take care of Cary Ray through nights such as this one had been. Doubtless Doctor Burns, once called, would take care of that; Black knew that under the proper treatment the following night might be one of comparative calm. But he could come to see him often; could cultivate his friendship—gain as much influence over him as possible. And if others found out about it, criticized him for giving time and thought to people outside his parish—well—they might. Black's decision on this head was one which brooked no interfer-

"You can't — see me through," she said. "You — I've no claim on you"

ence. Where he could help he would help, in his parish or out of it. . . .

It was at five o'clock in the morning that he fell asleep. He had not meant to go to sleep, and had been caught unawares. For an hour Cary had been quiet. Black, sitting on the edge of his bed, had found a new way to keep hold of his man—and that was by keeping hold of him literally. In a moment of desperation he had seized the thin, restless fingers and forced them to remain still in his own. The firm contact had produced a remarkable effect. After a little Cary's hand had laid hold of Black's and clung to it, while the invalid himself had sunk almost immediately away into something more resembling real slumber than anything in the past night. Finding this expedient so successful Black had allowed it to continue, for each time he tried to release himself Cary took a fresh grip, like a child who will not let go his hold upon his mother, even in unconsciousness. Finally, Black had made himself as comfortable as he could by slipping down upon the floor, where he could rest his head upon the bed without withdrawing his hand. And in this posture, one eloquent of his own fatigue from the long vigil, he went soundly to sleep.

So when, with the approach of daylight, Jane came in to tell her assistant that he must go home now, while the streets were empty of observant eyes, she found what she had not expected. She stood looking at the two figures the one stretched so comfortably in the bed, the other propped in so strained an attitude outside of it. As she looked something very womanly and beautiful came into her eyes.

"Is it possible—" this was her thought—"that *you* have done this—for *me?* I didn't know men of your

profession ever did things like this. But if I had known any of them ever did, I should have known it would be you!"

He looked like a tall and fine-featured boy as he slept in his twisted position, did Robert McPherson Black. He had taken off his coat while he wrestled with Cary, and the white shirt-sleeves rolled to the elbows, showing a sinewy forearm, added to the boyish effect. Suddenly Jane's eyes caught sight of something on one bare arm which made her stoop lower, and then flush with chagrin. It was the unmistakable mark upon the fair flesh of gripping fingers with nails which had torn—already turning dark, as such deep bruises do. It was a little thing enough—Jane knew already how her new friend would make light of it if she mentioned it—and yet somehow it was rather a big thing, too. It gave emphasis to the service he had done her; how could she have dealt, alone, with wild brutality like that?

Then, as she looked, Cary roused, turned, opened his eyes, withdrew his hand with a jerk, and Black woke also. And Cary was sane again, and very weak, and spoke querulously:

"What the devil——" he began. "Who are you—and what are you doing here?" Then, to Jane,—"Is this a cheap lodging house, and do you take in every vagrant that comes along?"

"I took you in, dear," said Jane, quietly. "And Mr. Black has stayed by you all night. He must be very tired."

Black laughed. "I've had quite a sleep, anyhow," he said, attempting with considerable difficulty to get upon his feet. "Certain areas seem to have been more asleep than others, though. My arm—" and he began to pinch

and pound it—"looks to be all here, but it feels rather absent." It was absent indeed, and hanging by his side, quite numb.

Cary's eyes widened. "You don't mean—why, you're the chap that—that——" His weak voice took on a tension.

"Never mind about the identification. I'm glad you're feeling better this morning."

"I don't feel better. I feel like the devil. But I—I'm certainly obliged to you. I—have you been here all—night?"

"Of course. Oh, thank you, Miss Ray—it'll come back in a minute," for Jane had come up and was applying a vigorous massage with her own hands to the inert arm.

"Well, I'll be——" but Cary left the exclamation unfinished, and began another. "I say—I'm not worth it!" he groaned, and buried his head in the crumpled white pillow.

Downstairs, presently, Black, ready to go, spoke authoritatively. "Please promise me you will call the Doctor early."

"I will," Jane agreed. "He has seen Cary before. If I could only have had him last night, and spared you—I shouldn't feel so guilty this morning. Why——" and at this moment, for the first time, a recognition came to her. It left her a little stunned. "Mr. Black," she said, unhappily, "I'm just realizing what day this is. It's——"

"Yes, it's Sunday," admitted Black, smiling, "And none the worse for that, is it?"

"But—you have to preach—and you've been up all night!"

"I suppose it's because I'm a Scot, but—I've seldom left my sermons till Saturday and Sunday to prepare. I'm all armed and equipped, Miss Ray—you've nothing to regret."

"But you haven't slept—you're frightfully tired——"

"Do I look as haggard as that? If I do, it's only because I need a clean shave. Come—if you weren't tied up I'd challenge you to go to church and see if I can't hit from the shoulder, in spite of my lusty right arm's getting numb for ten minutes in your service. Good-by, for the present, Miss Ray. I shall call you up, later, to learn if the Doctor's been here. And I shall—make friends with your brother the very best I know how."

He looked straight down into her uplifted eyes as he shook hands—with no lingering or extra pressure this time, just the hard, comradely grasp it was his nature to give. Then he was gone, out into the early morning twilight, without a glance to right or left to see if any saw him go.

An hour later Red came in, looked the situation over, and commented brusquely:

"You must have had a—an Inferno—of a night with him."

"I didn't—because I wasn't alone. Mr. Black stayed all night and took care of him."

"What?" The quick question spoke incredulity. Red stared at her.

"He brought Cary from the station, and then stayed—because—he thought he was needed. I don't know quite what I should have done without him."

Red whistled. "You bet you don't. Well, well—the minister certainly is game. Didn't worry about what some old lady of the parish might think, eh?"

Jane drew herself up. "You don't mean that, Doctor Burns."

He laughed. "No, I don't mean that. There was every reason why he should ignore any such possibility—I

understand the situation exactly. But I think it was rather game of him, just the same. A case like Cary's isn't exactly a joke to take care of, and the average outsider gets out from under—and sends flowers to show his sympathy—or a bottle of whisky, according to his lights. Well—to go back to this precious brother of yours——"

"That is the right adjective," said Jane Ray, steadily. "You know perfectly well, Doctor Burns, he's all I have."

"Yes, I know." He returned the look. "And I'll do my best to put him on his feet again. But he needs something neither you nor I can give him. I'm inclined to think—and this is something of a concession for me to make, Jane—I'm inclined to think Robert Black could. Cary's a dreamer—and a weak one. Bob Black's a dreamer—but a strong one. If he could get Cary to—well—to dream the right sort of dream——You see, it's a case where a knowledge of psychology might take a hand where a knowledge of pathology falls down. Do you get me?"

"I think I do. You want me to—encourage an acquaintance between them?"

"That's exactly what I mean. I know you're no churchgoer, my dear—and I admit I've never been much of a one myself. I feel a bit differently of late—perhaps you can guess why. If you could get Cary under the influence of this man Black—a friendship between them might do the trick. Anyhow, don't lay any stones in the way out of fear of putting yourself under obligations to Black. I've discovered that he's happiest when he's doing some absolutely impossible thing for somebody to whom he's under no obligation to do it. People take advantage of a disposition like that—but he can't exactly be trampled on, either—so you're pretty safe. Now—to

come down to brass tacks——" And he fell to giving her precise directions as to the line of treatment he wished carried out.

"He'll sleep to-night," he prophesied. "He's got to. I'll come around this evening and put him under for you. Good-bye for now, and remember I'm on the job."

She was feeling, as she went back to her difficult task, more hopeful about Cary than she had ever felt hitherto. Well she might. She had now enlisted in his behalf the whole power of a reconstructing force of which until now she had hardly recognized the existence.

CHAPTER VIII

SPENDTHRIFTS

ROBERT BLACK was dressing for the day. This procedure, simple and commonplace enough in the schedule of the ordinary man, was for him usually a somewhat complicated process. The reason for this was that he was apt to be, as to-day, attempting at the same time to finish the reading from some left-over chapter of the book he had been devouring the last thing before he went to bed. Of course he could neither take his cold tub nor shave his always darkening chin while perusing the latest addition to his rapidly growing library. But the moment these activities were over, he could and did don his attire for the day while engaged in scanning the printed page propped upon the chest of drawers before him. The result of this economy of time was that he seldom actually heard the bell ring to summon him to his breakfast, and was accustomed to appear in the dining-room doorway, book in one hand, morning paper just gathered in from the doorstep in the other, and to find there Mrs. Hodder awaiting him in a grieved silence. He would then offer her a smiling apology, upon which she would shake her head over the incomprehensible ways of men who thought more of the feeding of brains than body, and proceed devotedly to serve him with food kept hot for his coming.

On this particular morning Black, strolling in as usual, book under his arm, newspaper stretched before him,

eagerly snatching at the headlines always big with war news these days, paused to finish a long paragraph, at the same time saying cheerfully, "Good morning, Mrs. Hodder. Late again, am I? Sorry! Afraid I'm hopeless. But—listen to this:" The paragraph finished, he looked up, emphatic comment on his lips. It died there even as it was born, for the room was empty, the table unset, the curtains at the windows undrawn. In brief, no breakfast was awaiting the minister this morning, and there was no possible explanation visible.

Black may have been an incorrigible student; he was also unquestionably a man of action. He threw book and paper upon the table and ascended the back stairs in long leaps. Had Mrs. Hodder overslept? It was inconceivable. The only other logical supposition then was that she was ill. If she were ill—and alone—of course he couldn't get to her too soon—hence the leaps. She must be very ill indeed to keep her from preparing the breakfast which, he had discovered, was to her, in the manse, nothing less than a rite.

He knocked upon her door. An unhappy voice instantly replied: "Open the door—just a crack—Mr. Black, and I'll tell you——"

He opened the door the required crack, and the explanation issued, in unmistakable accents of suffering:

"I tried my best to get down, I did indeed, Mr. Black. But the truth is I can't move. No—no—" at an exclamation from outside the door denoting sympathy and alarm—"I haven't got a stroke nor anything like that. It's nothing more nor less than the lumbago, and I'm humiliated to death to think I got such a thing. I'm subject to it, and that's the truth, and I never know when it'll ketch me, but I haven't had a touch of it since I've been with you.

I begun to think there was something about the manse—and doing for a minister, maybe—that kept it away. But—it's caught me good this time, and I don't know what you'll do for your breakfast. I think maybe you'd better go over to the——"

But here Black interrupted her. "I'll get my own breakfast," he announced firmly, "and yours, too. Stay perfectly quiet till I bring you up a tray. After that we'll have the doctor in to see you——"

He was interrupted in his turn. "I don't want any doctor. Doctors can't do a thing for lumbago—except tell you you got chilled or something, and to keep still and rest up. When the pain goes it goes, and you can't tell when. Maybe 'long about noon I can get downstairs. I don't want any breakfast, and if you'll go over to the——"

"I'm not going to the hotel, Mrs. Hodder—and you're not going without your breakfast. I will——"

"You can't cook!"

"I can cook enough to keep us from starving. Now, lie still and I'll——"

"You don't know where a thing is——"

"I can find out."

A groan issued from the hidden bed. "I never knew a man that could. Listen here, Mr. Black. Now the coffee's in the closet up above the kitchen table, the third door from the right. It's in the same can it comes in, but it ain't ground, and the grinder's in the pantry, fastened to the wall. There may be some basins piled in front of it—I don't remember—likely they is. The cream's in the ice-chest—and *don't* skim the first pan you come to, because that's night's milk. You want to skim yesterday morning's pan, and that's pushed back farther. Now the bread-box——"

"I know where that is—"

"The oatmeal's in the double boiler—all you have to do is to set it front of the stove, and make sure the water ain't all boiled away. Lucky I always cook *that* the night before. I suppose you don't know how to light the gas in the broiler, so you can toast your bread. It's the third knob to the left——"

Black got away at last, further instructions following him by the air line, in spite of his shouted assurance that he could find everything and do everything, and that his housekeeper should rest comfortably and stop worrying. It must be confessed, however, that he was worrying a bit himself, for his first thought that he would make a breakfast of oatmeal—since that was already cooked—and let it go at that, was instantly followed by the recollection that Mrs. Hodder didn't eat oatmeal herself, but relied principally upon the toast and coffee and boiled egg he himself was accustomed to take with her. Unquestionably she must have these, and it was up to him to prepare them.

He removed his coat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and went at it. He lighted the gas and moved the double boiler forward, thus assuring himself of one staple article upon the breakfast schedule. He then began a search for the coffee, congratulating himself upon remembering that the filtered beverage with which he was accustomed to be served took time to make. Thus began the tragic hour which followed. . . .

Three quarters of an hour later young Tom Lockwood came to the manse door and rang the bell. Black paused, halfway between stove and pantry, then turned back to the stove, because his sense of smell told him unmistakably that something fatally wrong was occurring there.

He tried to diagnose the case in a hurry, failed, and hastened unwillingly through the house to the door, wondering just how flushed and upset he looked. He felt both to an extreme degree. Absolutely nothing seemed to be going right with that breakfast.

Tom came in, in his customary breezy way. "Morning! Thought I'd drop in and see if you didn't want to run up on the hills to-day, same as you said a while back, when we both had a morning to spare." He paused, surveying his host with an observant eye. "Anything the matter, Mr. Black? Haven't had—bad news, or anything?"

Black smiled. "Do I look as despondent as that? No, no—everything's all right, thank you. But I'm afraid I can't get away this morning to go with you. My housekeeper's not very well. I——"

"Look here." Tom eyed a black mark on the minister's forehead, and noted the rolled-up shirt-sleeves. "You're not—trying to get breakfast, are you? I say—I'll bet that's what you're doing. If you are, let me help. I can make dandy coffee." Suddenly he sniffed the air. "Something's burning!"

The two ran back to the kitchen, making a race of it. Black won, his nostrils full now of a metallic odour. He dashed up to the stove where a double-boiler was protesting that its lower section had long since boiled dry and was being ruined, and hastily removed it. He gazed at it ruefully.

"She told me to look out for it," he admitted.

"Some little cook, you are!" Tom, hands in pockets, surveyed a saucepan in which two eggs were boiling violently, fragments of white issuing from cracked shells. "Busted 'em when you put 'em in, didn't you? How

long have they been at it—or isn't there any time limit to the way you like your eggs?"

Black snatched the saucepan off. "I think I must have put them on some twenty minutes ago. You see, the toast distracted my mind." He set down the saucepan and hurriedly wrenched open the door of the broiler. "Oh—thunder!" he exploded. Blackened ruins were all that met the eye.

Tom leaned against a table, exploding joyously. "Want me to say it for you?" he offered.

"Thanks." Black's jaw was now set grimly. "I wonder if there's any fool thing I haven't done—or failed to do. Anyhow, the coffee——"

Tom got ahead of him at that, lifted the pot, turned up the lid, estimated the contents of the upper container, and shook his head. "The brew will be somewhat pale, methinks," was his comment. "I say, Mr. Black, you're no camper, are you?"

"Never had the chance. And never spent an hour learning to cook. I'm awfully humiliated, but that doesn't help it any. It did seem simple—to boil an egg and make a slice of toast."

"It isn't—it's darned complicated. Oatmeal and coffee make the scheme horribly intricate, too. I know all about it. I've leaped around between two camp fires and frizzled my bacon to death while I rescued my coffee, and knocked over my coffee pot while I fished up the little scraps of bacon from the bottom of the frying-pan. Here—I'll fix the coffee. Start some more toast, and we'll hash up that hard-boiled-egg effect to lay on top, and pretend we meant it that way from the first. Along towards noon we'll have that tray ready for the lady upstairs."

"Tom, you're a man and a brother. But I'm going to

send you off and see this thing through alone if it takes all day." And Black pushed him gently but firmly toward the door. Tom, laughing, found it no use to resist. He paused to lay an appraising hand on the bare forearm which was showing such unexpected strength.

"Some muscle, I'll say. Nobody'd guess it under that clerical coat-sleeve. Look here—you'll come over to dinner to-night, and get a square meal? Mother'll be——"

"Tom, if you so much as mention the situation here I'll make you pay dearly—see if I don't! We're all right. I'll never make these same mistakes again. If Mrs. Hodder isn't down by night I'll buy a tin of baked beans. Promise you won't give me away."

"Oh, all right, all right. You can trust me. But I don't see why——"

"I do—and that's enough. Good-bye, Tom."

They went through the hall arm in arm, parted at the door, and Tom ran back to his car. "You're some Scotchman, Robert Black," he said to himself. "But I wish you'd let me make that coffee."

It was nine-thirty by the kitchen clock when Mrs. Hodder received her breakfast tray. She had managed, smotheredly groaning, to don a wrapper, and to comb her iron-gray locks, so that according to her ideas of propriety she might decently admit her employer to her rigidly neat apartment.

"I'm terrible sorry to make you all this trouble, Mr. Black," she said. "My, it's wonderful how you've done all this." And she eyed the little tray with its cup of steaming coffee, now a deep black in hue, its two slices of curling but unburned toast, and its opened egg.

"I think it's rather wonderful myself," the minister conceded. Moisture stood upon his brow; his right wrist

showed a red mark as of a burn; but his look was triumphant. "I hope you'll enjoy it. And I've asked Doctor Burns to look in, on his rounds, and fix you up. If he says you should have a nurse we'll have one."

"I don't want the doctor, and I won't have a nurse—for the lumbago; I'd feel like a fool. All that worries me is how you'll manage till I can get round. You ain't used to doin' for yourself."

"I've done for myself in most ways ever since I came over from Scotland, a boy of sixteen. Come, eat your egg, Mrs. Hodder. I'll be back for the tray soon. Let me put another pillow behind your back——"

He would wait on her, she couldn't help it, and it must be admitted she rather enjoyed it, in spite of the pain that caught her afresh with every smallest move. It was like having a nice son to look after her, she thought. She submitted to his edict that she was to trust him to run the house in her absence from the kitchen, and if she had her doubts as to how he would accomplish this, they gave way before the decision in his tone.

It was three days after this that Red, coming in at five in the afternoon, to take a look at Mrs. Hodder, whom he had been obliged to neglect since his first visit in a pressure of work for sicker patients, discovered Black in the midst of his new activities. The minister was hurriedly sweeping and dusting his study, having rushed home from a round of calls at the recollection that a committee meeting, which included three women, was to be held there that evening. Mrs. Hodder was accustomed to keep the room in careful order; he himself had been throwing things about it for three days now,—and undusted black walnut desks and other dark furniture certainly do show neglect in a fashion peculiarly unreserved.

"Well, well!" Red paused in the study door. "I knew you were a man of action, but I didn't know it extended this far. Can't anybody be found to bridge the chasm?"

"I don't want anybody, thanks. A little exercise won't hurt me. Will you stop a minute? I'll dust that leather chair for you."

To his surprise Red moved over to the chair and sat down on the arm of it. "You look a trifle weary," he observed.

"That's the dirt on my face. I swept the room with violence—it needed it. Most of the dust settled on me."

"They should equip the manse with a vacuum cleaner. Been rather busy to-day?"

"Somewhat. Have you?" Black's glance said that in both cases the fact went without saying.

"I heard of you in a place or two—been on your trail more or less all day, as it happens."

"I presume so. This is my day for calling at the hospital. It struck me I was on *your* trail, Doctor."

"A sort of vicious circle? If you feel as vicious as I do after it, you're ready for anything. What do you say to a camp supper in the woods to-night—instead of tinned beans?"

There were two items in this speech which arrested Black's attention. He stopped dusting. "What do you know about tinned beans?" he inquired, suspiciously.

"Tom has no use for 'em," was the innocent reply. "Never mind—he didn't tell anybody but me. I've been having things rather thick myself lately, and just now—well, I feel like taking to the tall timber. Want to go with me? The woods are rather nice—on a dry winter night like this."

"You don't mean it literally—a camp supper?"

"Good Lord, man, where were you brought up? I thought you were a country boy?"

"I am—of the South country—Scotland first—the States second. But I never went camping in my life. I never had time."

"Till this week?" Red's eyes twinkled enjoyingly. "You can make coffee by now, I'll wager. But you can't touch me at making it. Put on your collar and come along. I'll treat you to a new experience, and by the look of you, you need it. So do I—we'll clear out together."

"I can't leave Mrs. Hodder without her supper—and I have a committee meeting at eight. I'm mighty sorry, Doctor——"

"You needn't be. I'll fix the whole thing, and have you back in time for the bunch. Come—take orders from me, for once."

Of course Black never had wanted to do anything in his life as he wanted to accept this extraordinary and most unprecedented invitation from the red-headed doctor whom he could not yet call his friend. The high barriers were down between them, there could be no doubt of that. Red no longer avoided the minister; he came to church now and then; the two met here and there with entire friendliness, and had more than once consulted each other on matters of mutual interest. But Red, except as he had taken Black into his car when passing him upon the road, had never directly sought him out on what looked like a basis of real pleasure in his society. And now, when Red, running upstairs to see Mrs. Hodder, and coming down to announce that all she wanted for supper was a little tea and bread and butter, and that it was up to Black to fix up a tray in a hurry and be ready when he, Red, should

get back—in about fifteen minutes—well, Black was pretty glad to give in, cast his broom and dust cloth into the kitchen closet, wash his hands, and put a little water to boil in the bottom of the kettle over a gas flame turned up so high that it was warranted to have the water bubbling in a jiffy!

"Now, you just go along with the doctor and rest up," commanded Mrs. Hodder, when the tray appeared. "He told me he was going to take you out to dinner—and I guess you need it—living on canned stuff, so. He thinks I can get down to-morrow, and I certainly do hope so. You look about beat out—and no wonder."

With this cordial send-off Black ran downstairs like a boy let out of school, his weariness already lessening under the stimulus of the coming adventure. Tired? Just to amuse himself, late last evening, he had made a list of the things he had done, the people he had seen, the letters he had written, the telephone calls he had answered—and all the rest of it. It had been a formidable list. And living on tinned beans, and crackers and cheese, had not been—— Oh, well—what did it matter, so he had got his work done, slighted nothing and nobody—though he could be by no means sure of that! What minister ever could?

He dressed as Red had ordered—heavy shoes, sweater under his overcoat, cap instead of hat—he felt indeed like a boy off on a lark, only that his busy, self-supporting life had not furnished him with many comparisons in the way of larks. As he ran down the manse steps he realized that it was a perfect winter night. There had been little snow of late; the air was dry and not too cold; the stars were out. And he was going camping in the woods with Red Pepper Burns—and it was not up to him to do the cooking!

The car slid up to the curb, a big basket in the place where Black was to put his feet; he had to straddle it. There was not too much time to spare—only a little over two hours. The car leaped away down the street, and in no time was off over the macadamized road on which speed could be made. And then, a mile away from that road, with rough going for that mile—but who cared?—they came to a clump of woods lying on a hillside, and the two were out and scrambling up it in the dark, Red evidently following a trail with accuracy, for Black found no difficulty in keeping up with him.

Upon the top of the hill was a bare, stony space, sheltered from the sides but open to the stars. And here, in astonishingly little time, were made two leaping fires the basis for which had been a small basket of materials brought in the car, upon which hot foundation the gathered sticks of the wood had no choice but to burn. Rustling fuel with energy, Black soon found himself ready to discard his overcoat, and by the time the thick steak Red was manipulating had reached its rich perfection, as only that master of camp cookery could make it, Black was thinking that, big as it was, he could devour the whole of it himself.

Coffee—what coffee! Had he ever known the taste of it before, Black wondered, as he sniffed the delicious fragrance? Red had worked so swiftly—in entire silence—that the hands of Black's watch pointed to a bare seven o'clock when he set his teeth into the first hot, juicy morsel of meat, feeling like a starved hound who has been fed upon scraps for a month.

"Oh, jolly!" he ejaculated. "I never tasted anything so good in my life. Or was so warm on a winter night—outdoors!"

"You bet you never tasted anything so good—nor were so warm outdoors. Why, man, you've missed the best fun in life, if this is your first experience. How does it happen?"

"I've never done anything but work, and my work never took me into the woods, that's all. I've looked at them longingly many a time, but—there was always something else to do. What a place this is! Of all places on earth to come to to-night this seems the best. It's an old favourite camping spot of yours?"

"One of many. This is nearest—I can run to it when I haven't time to get farther. Even so—I don't manage it very often."

"I'm sure you don't!" Black's eyes, in the firelight, looked across into Red's. The moment the cookery was done Red had replenished both fires, and the two men now sat on two facing logs between them. "Your time is fuller than that of any man I ever knew," Black added.

"Lots of busy men in the world."

"I know. But your hours are fuller than their full hours because of what you do—your profession."

"I do only what I have to do. But you—I wonder if you know it, Black—you're a spendthrift!"

"What?" The explosive tone spoke amazement.

Red nodded. "I've been wanting to tell you for some time. Do you know you probably weigh about fifteen pounds less than you did when you came here? Keep that up, and you'll be down to rock bottom."

Black laughed. He held up one arm, the hand clenched. "Do you remember the challenge I gave you last summer, Doctor, to a wrestle, any time you might take me up? If we weren't both stuffed, just now, I'd have it out with you, here and now."

"Very likely you could put it all over me—though I'm not so sure of that." Red was eyeing his companion with the professional eye still. "But—go on as you are doing, and a year from now it'll be different. You're wasting nervous energy—and you can't afford to. It's as I say—you're a spendthrift. What's the use?"

"I'm a Scotsman—and that's equivalent to saying I spend only what's necessary. It's a contradiction in terms——"

"It is not—excuse me. I've been reading about one of your Scottish regiments over there—cut to pieces—and they knew they were going to be when they went into it. Call them thrifty—of their lives?"

"Ah, that's different. They were glorious. As for that, Doctor—to right-about-face with my defense—why shouldn't one be a spendthrift with his life? You're one yourself."

"Not I. I practice my profession, and mine only. You practice—about four. Last week I caught you playing nurse to a family of small children while their mother went shopping." Red held up a silencing hand at Black's laughter. "Yes, I know she hadn't been out for a month. That same night you made a speech somewhere—and sat up the rest of the night with Cary Ray—— Oh, yes—I know he's improved a lot lately, but he got restless that night and you stuck by. Next day——"

"Doctor Burns——"

"Wait a minute. Next day you——"

"How do you come to be keeping tab on me?" Black stood up, fire in his eye. "See here! Last week you did seven operations on patients who couldn't afford to pay you a cent—and they weren't in charity wards, either. Day before yesterday——"

But he had to stop, having but fairly begun. Red's expression said he wouldn't stand for it. The two regarded each other in the light of the fires, and both faces were glowing ruddily. They suggested two antagonists about to spring.

"If I'm a spendthrift, so are you!" Black challenged. "Why shouldn't we be, at that? Who gets anything out of life—not to mention giving anything—who isn't a spendthrift? '*He who saveth his life shall lose it*'—and nobody knows that better than you, Doctor Burns!"

"But you waste yours, you know," said Burns, with emphasis.

"No more than you do."

"I do it to save life."

"And what do I do it for?" The question came back like a shot, with stinging emphasis and challenge.

The two pairs of eyes continued to meet clashingly, and for a minute neither would give way. Then Red said, with a rather grudging admission, " I know you think you have to do all these extras, and you do them with intent and purpose, and willingly, at that. But I don't back down on my proposition—that you're working harder at it than is necessary. I'll admit I want you to do what you can for Cary Ray—for his sister's sake. But when it comes to the DuBoises, and the Corrigans, and the Andersons—why should you spend yourself on them—ungrateful beggars?"

"I can only ask you, Doctor, why you spend yourself on the Wellands and the Kalanskys, and the Kellys?"

Suddenly Red's attitude changed, with one of those characteristic quick shifts which made him such delightful company. He looked at his watch and sat down on the log again. "Six minutes to stay, and then back to that

blamed committee meeting for yours, and back to my office for me—I can see ten people sitting there now, in my mind's eye. Hang it—why can't a fellow stay in the open when it's there he can be at his best, physically and mentally?"

"It seems to make you a bit pugilistic!"

Red looked up, laughing. "How about you? For a parson it strikes me you can fight back with both fists."

"Doctor—let's have that wrestle now! I'd like it to remember."

"You would, would you? Hold on—don't take off your coat. I know better than to play tricks with my digestion like that, if you don't. You're younger than I—you might get away with it. But—I'll give you that tussle some day you're so anxious for."

"Meanwhile—I wish you'd give me something else."

"What's that?" Red was instantly on his guard—Black could see that clearly. He had expected it. But it did not deter him from saying the thing he wanted to say.

"Shake hands with me. Did you know you never have?"

"Never have!"

"Not the way I want you to. I'm asking you now to shake hands with my profession. I'm tired of having you against it. I ask you to give it fair play in your mind. You admit that it's worth while for you to spend the last drop you have for human life. But it's wasting good red blood for a man to spend his for human souls. Do you mean it? Ah, Doctor Burns, you don't. Tell me so—the way I want you to."

The suspicion dropped out of Red's eyes, but into them came something else—the showing of a dogged human will.

He stood looking into the fire, his hands in his pockets—where they had been for some time. He made no motion to withdraw them. Black's hands were clasped behind him—he made no motion to extend them. A long silence succeeded—or long it seemed to Black, at least. Had he lost his case? He had never thought to state it thus to Red—but when the moment came it had seemed to him he could do no otherwise. . . . His heart beat rather heavily. . . . How was Red going to take it?

The red-headed surgeon looked up at last. "Do you mean you want me to shake hands with your entire profession—all the men in it?"

"Are there no charlatans in medicine? But *you*—are the real thing. I wouldn't deny you a handshake—if you wanted it."

Slowly Red drew his right hand out of his pocket. "You want this tribute—to you, as a minister?"

Then Black's eyes flamed. He took a step backward. "I want no 'tribute,' Doctor,—my heaven!—you don't think that! All I want is—to know that—as a minister you can shake hands with me and believe—that I'm as real as I know you to be. If you can't do that——" he turned aside. "Oh, never mind! I didn't mean to try to force it from you. Let's be off. It must be high time, and it's more than high time if——"

A hand fell on his shoulder and stayed there. Another hand found his and gripped it tight. "Oh, come along. Bob Black!" said a gruff voice with yet a ring in it. "You're the realest chap I know. And I've tried my darned best not to like you—and I can't get away with it. *Now*—are you satisfied?"

CHAPTER IX

"BURN, FIRE, BURN!"

"SIS, I'll stump you to go to church with me this morning!"

It may have been rather a peculiar form of invitation to attend upon the service of the sanctuary, but that was not the reason for the startled expression on Jane Ray's face. She simply couldn't believe that it was her brother Cary who was making the proposal. Church!—when had Cary ever gone to any church whatever?—unless it might have been for the purpose of gathering material for some brilliant, ironic article with which to do his share in that old fight of the world against the forms of religion. As for herself—it had long been her custom to employ her Sunday mornings in making up her business accounts for the week.

Her reply was a parry. "What church would you suggest going to?"

Cary's glance at her was both sharp and whimsical. "Is there more than one? According to what I hear, the 'Stone Church,' as they call it, is the one where the town is flocking to hear our friend, the fighting parson, say things that stop the breath. I understand his trustees are mostly pacifists. It must grind 'em like fun to hear their Scotsman firing his machine gun, regardless. I admit I want to be in on it. I think this country's going to get into it before long, and when it does I expect to see Robert Black off like a shot for some place where pacifists are unpopular."

"He has never asked us to come to his church," Jane temporized.

"No. That's why I want to go. I've been waiting all this while to have him ask me, so I could turn him down. But he never has, so, being quite human, I'm piqued into going on my own motion. Come along, Sis. I'll guarantee if an old sinner like me can stand the gaff, a young saint like you will be in her element."

Jane gave him a sparkling smile. "Very well, Cary Ray. It will be your fault if we feel like fish very much out of water and don't know how to act. I haven't been in a church in at least three years."

"The more shame to you. Most of them are mighty comfortable places in which to sit and pursue your own train of thought, and on that ground alone you should be a constant attendant. Though I doubt very much if we are able to pursue any train of thought, within hearing of R. Black, except the one he chooses to put up to us. The more I've seen of him the more I've discovered of his little tendency to keep one occupied with him exclusively. Well, if you'll go I'll have a clean shave and look up my best gloves. We'll give him a bit of a surprise. To tell the truth, I'm beginning to think we owe it to him."

There could be small doubt of this. In the three months which had intervened between Cary Ray's arrival—for all hope there seemed of him, both physically and morally down and out—Robert Black had stood steadily by him. His comradeship had been a direct challenge to Cary's better self, and all that was good in the young man—and there was undoubtedly very much—had rallied to meet the sturdy beckoning of this new friend. At an early date the two had discovered that, different as they were in character, they had one thing mightily in common

—the delights and tortures of the creative brain. Jane had called Cary a genius, and so he was—perhaps in the lesser and more commonly used meaning of the too much used word. His articles on any theme were always welcomed in certain of the best newspaper and magazine offices, and only his lack of dependability and his erratic ways of working had kept him from rapid advancement in his world.

Black, discovering almost at once that he had to deal with a brain which, if it could be freed from the handicap of dissipation, would be capable of production worth any effort to salvage from the threatened wreck, had thrown himself, heart and soul, into winning Cary's friendship on the ground of their common interest and understanding. To do this he had used every particle of skill he possessed, and his reward had been the knowledge of the steadily lengthening periods of Cary's reasonableness and his response to the stimulus which will always be greater than almost any other—the demand of a friend who cares that we live up to his belief in us. Cary had come to think of Robert Black as the best friend he had in the world, after his sister, and to look forward to the hours the two spent together as the brightest spots in a life which had become dimmed at an age when it should have known its fullest zest.

Thus it came about that Robert Black, entering his pulpit that Sunday morning, and presently taking estimate of his congregation, as a preacher must do if he is to know how to aim accurately and fire straight, caught sight of two people whose presence before him gave him a distinct shock of surprise. He had been sure he would some time get that shock, but it had been long delayed, and he had rather doggedly persisted in withholding the direct invita-

tion, reasoning with himself that he would rather have Jane and Cary come for any other reason than the paying of the debt he knew they must feel they owed him.

And now they were there before him—rather near him, too. Young Perkins, one of the ushers for the middle aisle, had pounced on them as a pair who would do credit to his natural desire to have all the best dressed and most distinguished looking strangers placed where they would do the most good to the personnel of the congregation. He knew Jane for what he called "a stunner," thereby paying youthful tribute to her looks and quiet perfection of dress. As for Cary, one glance of appraisal had placed him, for Perkins, in the class of the "classy," than which there is no greater compliment in the vocabulary of the Perkinses. Therefore it was that Perkins, leading Jane and Cary down the middle aisle, had complacently slipped them into the pew of one of the leading members—to-day out of town, as he knew—and thus had left them within exceedingly close range of whatever gunfire might be at the command of the pulpit. Perkins, having hurriedly scanned the headlines of the morning papers, had a hunch that it was going to be one of those mornings when the congregation would be likely to leave the church with its hair a trifle rampant on its brow from excited thrustings—or with its hats a little askew from agitated noddings or shakings. He had come to look forward to such Sundays with increasing zest. There was something else to stake quarters on with the other ushers, these days, than on how late Doctor Burns was going to be at church, or how short a time he would be permitted to remain there. Perkins was beginning to wonder how he had ever endured the dull times of Black's immediate predecessor; certainly he was rejoicing that they were over.

Frances Fitch, in the Lockhart pew, just across the aisle and two rows behind Jane and Cary, found the pair a particularly interesting study. Through Tom she had heard much of Cary; she had caught only unsatisfying glimpses before. As he sat at the end of the pew nearest the aisle she had a full view of that profile which had first assured Black that Cary was indeed Jane's brother, and it now struck Miss Fitch as one of the most attractive masculine outlines she had ever seen. Cary was still distinctly pale, but his pallor was becoming more healthy with each succeeding day of Jane's skillful feeding, and his manner had lost its excessive nervousness. To the eye, by now, he merely looked the interesting convalescent from a possibly severe illness, with every probability of a complete return to full fitness of body. As to his mind—one glance at him could hardly help suggesting to the intelligent observer that here was a young man who possessed brains trained to the point of acuteness and efficiency in whatever lines they might be employed.

To look at either Cary or Jane, moreover, one would hardly have said that church was to them so unaccustomed a place. Jane, sitting or rising with the rest, sharing hymn-book or printed leaf of the responsive service with her brother, appeared the most decorous of regular communicants. For herself, however, she was experiencing many curious reactions, the most distinct of which, throughout the preliminary service, was caused by the sight of Robert McPherson Black, in his gown, and with the high gravity upon him which she had never before seen in precisely its present quality. Could this be the spirited young man who came so often to spend an hour with Cary, his face and manner full of a winning gayety or of an equally winning vigour of speech and action?

This was another being indeed who confronted her, a being removed from her as by a great gulf fixed, his fine eyes by no chance meeting hers, his voice by no means addressed to her, but to the remotest person in his audience, far back under the gallery. For the first time Jane Ray was realizing that well as it had seemed to her that she had come to know the man Black, she actually knew him hardly at all, for here, in this place to her so unfamiliar, was his real home!

And then, very soon came an equally strong reaction from this first impression of remoteness. For, the moment the anthems and the responses and the rest of the preliminary service was over, and Black had been for three minutes upon his feet in his office of preacher, the whole situation was reversed. No longer did he seem to be sending that trained and reverent voice of his to every quarter of the large, hushed audience room; but in a new and arresting way he was addressing Jane Ray very directly, he was speaking straight to her, and she had quite forgotten that there was any one else there to hear. If this impression of hers was precisely like that which reached each person within sound of his voice who possessed the intelligence to listen, that was nothing to her—nor to them. The simple fact was that when Robert Black spoke to an audience as from his very first word he was speaking now, that audience had no choice but to listen, and it listened as individuals, with each of whom he was intimately concerned.

As for Cary Ray—perhaps there was nobody in that whole audience so well qualified to measure the speaker's ability and power as he. He had spent no small portion of his early after-college days in reporting for a great city daily, and his assignment very often had been the follow-

ing up of one noted speaker after another. He had listened to eloquence of all sorts, spurious and real; had come to be a judge of quality in human speech in all its ramifications; was by now himself a literary critic of no inferior sort. His mind, at its best—and it was not far short of its best on this Sunday morning—was keen and clear. As he gave himself up to Black as one gives himself up to a friend who is setting before him a matter of import, he was a hearer of the sort whom speakers would go far to find.

Did Black know this? Unquestionably he did. He knew also that Red was in his audience this morning, and Jane Ray, and Nan Lockhart, and Fanny Fitch, and many another, and that every last one of them was listening as almost never before. How could they help but hear, when he was saying to them that which challenged their attention as he was challenging it now?

This was in February, nineteen seventeen. Diplomatic relations with Germany had been severed; America was on the brink of war. One tremendous question was engaging the whole country: was it America's duty to go into war? Was it her necessity? Was it—and here a few voices were rising loud and clear—was it not only her necessity and her duty—was it her privilege?

No doubt where Robert Black stood. It was America's privilege, the acceptance of which had been already too long postponed. In no uncertain terms he made his conviction clear. The blood baptism which was purifying the souls of other countries must be ours as well, or never again could we be clean. To save our souls—to save our souls—that was his plea!

"Oh, I wish," he cried out suddenly toward the end, "I wish I had the dramatic power to set the thing before you so that you might see it as you see a convincing play

upon a stage. Never a human drama like this one—and we—are sitting in the boxes! Bathed and clean clothed and gloved—gloved—we are sitting in the boxes and looking on—and applauding now and then—as loudly as we may, wearing gloves! And over there—their hands are torn and bleeding with wounds—while we delay—and delay—and delay!"

Down in the pew before him Cary Ray suddenly clenched his fists. His arms had been folded—*his* hands were gloved. Gloved hands could clench then! Into his brain—now afire with Black's own fire, as it had been more than once before now as the two talked war together—but never as now—never as now—there sprang an idea, glowing with life. His writer's instinct leaped at it, turned it inside out and back again, saw it through to its ultimate effort—and never once lost track of Black's closing words, or missed a phrase of the brief prayer that followed, a prayer that seemed to rise visibly from the altar, so burning were the words of it. : Cary rose from his seat, a man illumined with a purpose.

Up the aisle he felt Red's hand upon his arm. Those orders to the usher not to call the red-headed doctor out for anything but an emergency had been regularly in force of late. Astonishingly often was the once absentee now able to make connections with his pew, at least in time for the sermon. To his friend Macauley, who now and then let loose jeering comments upon the subject of his change of ways, he was frank to admit that it did make a difference in the drawing power of the church whether the man in the pulpit could aim only soft and futile blows, or whether he could hit straight and fast and hard. "And whether," Red added once, bluntly, "you happen to know that he practises precisely what he preaches."

In Cary's ear Red now said incisively: "What are you betting that sermon will cost him half his congregation?"

Cary turned, his dark eyes afire. "If it does, we'll fill it up with vagrants like me. My lord, that was hot stuff! And this is the first time I've heard him—more fool I. Why didn't you let a fellow know?"

Red laughed rather ruefully. "Cary," he said, "it's astonishing how we do go on entertaining angels unawares. But when we get one with a flaming sword, like this one, we're just as liable to cut and run as to stay by and get our own hands on a hilt somewhere."

"I've got mine on one, I promise you," murmured Cary. His one idea now was to reach home and lay his hand upon it. If, to him, his fountain pen was the trustiest sword in his arsenal, let none disparage that mighty weapon. In his hands, if those hands remained steady, it might in time do some slashing through obstacles.

It was just three days later that Jane Ray, coming in from the shop, saw Cary sling that pen—hurriedly capped for the purpose—clear across the table, at which for those three days he had been writing almost steadily. He threw up his arms in a gesture of mingled fatigue and triumph.

"Janey," he said, "I want you to send for Robert Black, and Doctor and Mrs. Burns, and your friend Miss Lockhart—you told me she wrote plays at college, didn't you? —and her friend, Miss Fitch, the raving beauty who acts —probably acts all the time, but none the worse for that, for my purpose. Also, Tommy Lockhart. I want 'em all, and I want 'em quick. I can't sleep till I've had 'em here to listen to what I've done. And now—if I weren't under your roof, and if I didn't care such a blamed lot about not letting Black down—I'd go out and take a

drink. Oh, don't worry—I won't—not just yet, anyhow. I'll go out and take a walk instead. My head's on fire and my feet are two chunks from the North Pole."

Happier than she had been for a long time, her hopes for her brother rising higher than they had yet dared to rise, in spite of all the encouragement his improvement had given her, Jane made haste to summon these people whose presence he had demanded. They came on short notice; even Red, who said at first that he couldn't make it by any possible chance, electrified them all and made Cary's pale cheek glow with satisfaction when at the last minute he appeared.

"Confound you, who are you to interfere with my schedule?" Red growled, as he shook hands. "I was due at a Medical Society Meeting, where I was booked as leader of a discussion. They'll discuss the thing to tatters without me, while I could have rounded 'em up and driven 'em into the corral with one big discovery that they're not onto yet."

"Mighty sorry, Doctor. But, you see, I had to have you." Cary grinned at him impudently. "I've been raving crazy for three days and nights, and if I can't call in medical aid on the strength of that—— Oh, I know I'm mighty presumptuous, but—well—listen, and I'll try to justify myself."

They listened for an hour. They could hardly help it. As a down-and-outer Cary Ray had been an object of solicitude and sympathy; as a clever, forceful, intensely yet restrainedly dramatic playwright, he was a person to astonish and take his new acquaintances off their feet. Stirred as he had been, gripped by the big idea Black had unknowingly put into his head, he had gone at this task as he had time and again gone at a difficult piece of news-

paper work. With every faculty alert, every sense of the dramatic possibilities of the conception stringing him to a tension, his thoughts thronging, his language fluid, his whole being had been sharpened into an instrument which his brain, the master, might command to powerful purpose. Thus had he written the one-act war play which was to fire the imagination, enlist the sympathies, capture the hearts of thousands of those who later saw it put upon the vaudeville circuit, where its influence, cumulative as the fame of it spread and the press comments grew in wonder and praise, was accountable for many a patriotic word and act which otherwise never had been born.

But now—he was reading it for the first time to this little audience of chosen people, "trying it out on them," as the phrase ran in his own mind. He had no possible doubt of its reception. His own judgment, trained to pass upon his own performance with as critical a sureness as upon that of any other man, told him that he had done a remarkable piece of work. To him it was ancient history that when he could write as he had written now, with neither let nor hindrance to the full use of his powers, it followed as the night the day that his editors would put down the sheets with that grim smile with which they were wont to accept the best a man could do, nod at him, possibly say: "Great stuff, Ray,"—and brag about it afterward where he could not hear.

To-night, when he laid down the last sheet and got up to stroll over to a shadowy corner and get rid of his own overwrought emotion as best he might, he understood that the silence which succeeded the reading was his listeners' first and deepest tribute to his art. His climax had been tremendous, led up to by every least word and indicated action that had gone before, the finished product

of a nearly perfect craftsmanship. Small wonder that for a long minute nobody found voice to express the moved and shaken condition in which each found himself.

But when it did come, there was nothing wanting. If they were glad beyond measure, these people, that they could honestly approve the work of this brother of Jane's, this was but a small part of the feeling which now had its strong hold upon them. Wonder, delight, eagerness to see the little drama glow like a jewel upon the stage—these were what brought words to the tongue at length. And then—plans!

"We can't get it on too quick," was Red's instant decision. "It must be done here first, and then turned loose on the circuit. We can handle it. Nan Lockhart can help you get it up, Cary—and take the part of the Englishwoman, too. Of course Miss Fitch must do the French actress—she's cut out for that. I'm inclined to think my wife would make the best Belgian mother. Tom can be the wounded young poilu, and you, Ray—will be the French officer to the life. As for the rest—we have plenty of decidedly clever young actors who will be equal to the minor parts."

There was a general laugh. "I seem to see the footlights turned on already," Cary declared. "But that's not a bad assignment. Would you—" he turned to Black—"I wonder if you would take the part of the American surgeon."

Now this was a great part, if a small one as to actual lines. Every eye turned to the minister. Fit the part—with that fine, candid face, those intent eyes? No doubt that he did. But he shook his head with decision.

"I'd do much for you, Ray," he said, "but not that. It's not possible for me to take a part. I've a real rea-

son," as Cary's lips opened, "so don't try to persuade me. But I'll help in every way I can. And as for the surgeon—why not take the one at hand?" And he indicated Burns himself.

"I'll *do* it!" announced Red, most unexpectedly.

They spent a fascinated hour discussing the characters and who could do them full justice. There was nobody to see, but if there had been a disinterested onlooker, he might have said to himself that here was a group of people who of themselves were playing out a little drama of their own, each quite unconsciously taking a significant part. There was R. P. Burns, M. D.—his red head and vigorous personality more or less dominating the scene. There was Ellen Burns, his wife—dark-eyed, serene, highly intelligent in the occasional suggestions she made, but mostly allowing others to talk while she listened with that effect of deep interest which made her so charming to everyone. There was Nan Lockhart, quick of wit and eager to bring all her past training to bear on the situation, her bright smile or her quizzical frown registering approval or criticism. There was Fanny Fitch, radiant with delight in the prospects opening before her, her eyes starry, her face repeating the rose-leaf hues of the scarf she wore within her sumptuous dark cape of fur—somehow Miss Fitch's skillful dressing always gave a point of light and colour for the eye to rest gratifiedly upon. Then there was Robert Black, rather quiet to-night, but none the less a person to be decidedly taken into account, as was quite unconsciously proved by the eyes which turned his way whenever he broke his silence with question or suggestion. There was Tom Lockhart, somehow reminding one of a well-trained puppy endeavouring to maintain his dignity while bursting to make mischief; his impish glance

resting on one face after another, his gay young speech occasionally causing everybody's gravity to break down—as when he solemnly declared that unless he himself were allowed to play some austerely exalted part yet to be written into the play he would go home and never come back. There was Jane Ray, who sat next Tom, and who somehow looked to-night as young as he—younger, even, than Miss Fitch, whose elegance of attire contrasted curiously with Jane's plain little dark blue frock. Jane's brunette beauty was deeply enhanced to-night by her warm colour and her brilliant smile; her sparkling eyes as she watched her brother gave everybody the impression that she was gloriously happy—as indeed she was. For was not Cary——

Cary himself was probably the figure in the room which, if this little scene had been actually part of a drama, would have become the focus of the audience's absorption. Interesting as they were, the other actors only contributed to his success—he was the centre of the stage. Dark, lithe, his excitement showing only in his flashing eyes, his manner cool, controlled—he was the picture of an actor himself. He was keenly aware that the tables had suddenly been turned, and that from being a mysterious sort of invalid, Jane's ne'er-do-well brother, he had emerged in an hour. He had gathered a wreath of laurels and set it upon his own brow, and was now challenging them all to say if he had not a place in the world after all, could not claim it by right of his amazing ability, could not ask to be forgiven all his sins in view of his dazzling exhibition of an art nobody had realized he possessed. Undeniably this was Cary's hour, and Jane, being only human, and loving him very much, was daring to believe once again that her brother was redeemed to her. It may

not be wondered at that now and again her eyes rested gratefully upon the two men who had done this thing for Cary—and for her. She knew that they must be rejoicing, too.

It was, therefore, something of a shock to her when from Robert Black, before they left, she had a low-toned warning. "Miss Ray—" Black had chosen his opportunity carefully; for the moment the two were well apart from the rest—"I don't dare not tell you to look out for him to-night. After we are gone, and he is alone, there will come an hour of—well—he will be more vulnerable than he has been for a month. Don't let him slip away—see him safely relaxed and asleep."

Jane's expression was incredulous. "Oh, not to-night, when he is so proud and happy—so glad to have you all his friends, and to show you at last that he is your equal in —so many ways."

He nodded gravely: "Believe me, I know what I'm saying. It's a bit of an intoxication in itself, this reaction from his long languor of mind. He's done a magnificent thing, and he's now in very great danger. Don't allow yourself to minimize it."

"Oh, you're very good!" Jane's tone was a little impatient, in spite of herself. "But you do misjudge him—to-night. Why, he's just his old self—as you've never known him. Of course, I'll stay by him—and I understand. But—his temptation has always been when he was blue and unhappy, not when he was on the top wave of joy, as he is to-night—as he deserves to be——" Her voice broke a little, she turned away. She herself was keyed higher than she knew; she simply couldn't bear to have Robert Black, or anybody else, distrust Cary to-night —dear, wonderful Cary, with his shining eyes and his

adorable smile, her beloved brother and his genius both restored to her.

Black's low voice came after her: "I'm sorry—I didn't mean to hurt your happiness to-night, of all nights. I only—want you to take care of him as——"

But she was off, back to her guests, cutting him short, with only a nod and half smile back at him, which showed him that she thought him wrong—and a little cruel, too.

She was surer than ever that he had been mistaken when they were all gone, their congratulations on Cary's work still ringing in her ears. He threw himself upon the couch with a long laughing breath and a prolonged stretch of the arms. "Smoke and ashes, but I'm tired!" he declared. "I'll stop and chin with you about ten minutes, and then it's me for bed."

He seemed hardly to listen while she told him how she felt about his work and the evening, how she knew they all felt. She could see that he was all at once very sleepy and exhausted, and when, before the ten minutes were barely up, he rose and stumbled across the room, declaring that he couldn't hold out another second, she smiled to herself as she put her arm on his shoulder and insisted on his good-night kiss. He had to cut a yawn in two to give it to her. This tired boy in any danger? Hardly! If he had still been excited and overstrung she might have had fears for him, but now—why, he would be asleep before he could get his clothes off—that was what was most likely to happen, after these three days and nights of consuming labour. She would look in, by and by, and make sure that, as in his boyish days, he had not thrown himself across the bed without undressing at all, and gone off into a deep slumber from which her sisterly ministrations would not wake him.

She never knew what actually happened that night. She was a long time herself in making ready for bed, and so busy were her thoughts that for an hour she quite forgot her resolve to make sure of Cary's safety. Then, just to prove that Black was unreasonable in his fears, she went to Cary's door, opened it very gently, and saw in the bed his motionless figure, evidently in as deep a sleep as any one could wish. She went back to her own room with a curious sense of injury upon her. Why had the minister tried to alarm her when there was so little need? Hadn't she had anxious hours enough?

Within a quarter of an hour the door of the shop very softly opened, and Cary Ray let himself out into the silent little street. His coat collar was up, his hat pulled over his eyes; he stole away on noiseless feet. If Jane could have seen then the eyes beneath that sheltering hat-brim she would have understood. Sleep? They had never been farther from it, so glitteringly sleepless were they.

But Robert Black saw those eyes—and he had already understood. As Cary slipped round the corner he ran straight into a tall figure coming his way. With a low exclamation of dismay he would have rushed by and away, but Black wheeled and was at his side, walking with him.

"Out for a walk, Ray?" said the low, friendly voice he had come to know so well. "I know how that is—I've often done it myself. Nothing like the crisp night air for taking that boiling blood out of a fellow's brain and sending it over his body, where it belongs. May I walk with you? I'm still abnormally keyed-up myself over that play of yours. No wonder you can't settle to sleep."

Well, Cary couldn't get away, and he knew he couldn't. As well try to escape an officer's handcuff if he had been caught stealing as that kind, inexorable offer of comrade-

ship through his temptation. He knew Black well enough by now to know that his standing by meant that he simply wouldn't let Cary's temptation have a chance—it might as well slink away and leave him, for it couldn't get to him past Robert Black's defense.

Quite possibly neither of these two ever could have told how many miles they walked that icy winter's night, but walk they did till every drop of Cary's hot blood was rushing healthily through his weary body, and the fires in his brain had died the death they must inevitably die under such treatment. They walked in silence for the most part. Cary wasn't angry, even at the first—he was ashamed, disappointed—but not angry. How could he be really angry with a man who loved him enough for this? And, deep down in his heart, presently he was glad—glad to be saved from himself. Was it for the man who had written that splendid play to take it out in the old degradation; was it for him who had made Truth shine in an embodiment of loveliness to drag its creator in the mire on this same night that his friends had looked upon his work and declared that it was good? When at last he stumbled wearily along the little street again, with a stumbling that was no feigning this time but the genuine sign of a fatigue so overpowering that sleep was almost on its heels, he was thankful to this strange and comprehending friend as he had never been thankful to him before.

"Good-night, Ray," said Robert Black, at the shop door, and under the street-light Cary saw the smile that had come to mean more to him to-night than it ever had before—and it had meant much already.

"Do you trust me now?" Cary met the dark eyes straightforwardly at last.

"Absolutely. I trusted *you* before. It was the over-

strained nerves and brain I was anxious for, because I've had them many a time myself. They're hard to manage. Taking them to walk is just good medicine, that's all. You'll sleep like a top, now."

"And you're sure I won't slide out, when you're gone?"

Black's hand gripped Cary's. "I'd stake my life on it."

Cary choked a little as he returned the grip. "You don't need to. I'd prefer to stake mine." Then he bolted, and the shop door closed behind him.

Black looked up at the wide-open window over the shop he knew was Jane's. "Sleep well, my friend," he was thinking. "I told you I'd stand by you—to the limit."

CHAPTER X

A SHIFTING OF HONOURS

TOM LOCKHART emerged from the stage dressing-room in the uniform of a French soldier, his face made up with paint and powder and crayon to indicate that he was in the final stages of suffering from gunshot wounds. His head was bandaged, his clothes were torn, but he gave the lie to these signs of disaster by dashing up the stairs and into the wings of the stage with the lusty action of perfect health and a great zest for his part.

Behind the big curtain he found all the actors in Cary's play assembled—except one. The star—everybody had taken to calling Fanny Fitch the star throughout the rehearsals—was still missing, quite after the manner of stars. It was yet early, and the audience in front was but half assembled, but Cary had laid great stress upon everybody's being ready and in the wings before the curtain should rise. He had small faith in amateur call boys and prompters, and the action of the play was to take place so rapidly that nobody could be permitted to linger in a dressing-room once the piece was on.

Cary greeted Tom as a laggard. Cary himself was a French officer—and looked the part to the life; but he was also a stage manager of martinet qualities.

"About time, you boy! Where's Miss Fitch? Go back and get her. Hustle!" The whisper hissed above the tuning of the orchestra.

Tom sped back downstairs. Red Pepper Burns, in the dress of an operating surgeon soiled and gory, his face made up to show lines of fatigue, commented in Nan Lockhart's ear: "Trust Fanny to play the part off stage as well as on. Presume she's reckoning on holding everything up till she gets here?"

Nan frowned. "You never do her justice, Doctor Burns. Fanny's a born actress, why shouldn't she have the little sins of one? But she's going to surprise you to-night. She really can act, you know. She's been only walking through rehearsals."

"All right—but she'll have to get a lot more punch into her work than I can believe her capable of. Speaking of punch—I haven't much left myself to-night," growled Red. The fatigue suggested by the lines upon his face had been easy to lay on, by the make-up man downstairs, who had had only to intensify those already there. As might easily have been prophesied by those who knew his life intimately, Red had just had a week of infernally hard work in the operating room, and was much fitter for a good night's sleep than for playing the part of a first line surgeon on the French front.

Robert Black, in the wings, was keeping in order a little group of children who were representing Belgian orphans—protégés of an Englishwoman who had come to France to help look after the refugees. Nan Lockhart had this part; it fitted her beautifully. Jane Ray was the Red Cross nurse in charge at the clearing station; her white uniform and glowing red veil brought out her dusky beauty of colouring strikingly. Three young American ambulance drivers—of whom Harry Perkins, the young usher at the Stone Church, was one—stood together in the wings, commenting favourably upon Miss Ray. Altogether, no-

body was really doing anything but waiting when Tom Lockhart, grinning joyously through his queerly contrasting pallid make-up, at last followed Fanny Fitch upon the stage.

She had refused to dress for the dress rehearsal of the preceding evening, explaining that her costume was as yet in the making. She had, quite as Nan had said, "walked through" her part and rather languidly, at that, in the street attire in which she had come to the little theatre which was the suburban town's pride. So now, quite suddenly and startlingly, appeared to the view of her fellow actors the French actress of music-hall fame whom Fanny was to represent in the part which Cary, the moment he had set eyes upon her—and, he might have added, found her eyes upon him—had declared would fit her like a glove. As Red and Ellen and Cary Ray and Robert Black now beheld the dazzling figure before them, there could be no question in their minds that if Miss Fitch could act the part as she now looked it, there would be nothing left to be desired. As for young Tommy Lockhart, he was clearly quite out of his head with a crazy admiration which he did not even attempt to disguise. What was the use? And must not all men be one with him in adoring this radiant creature?

Fanny was a vision—there's no use denying it. All that fairness of feature and provocation of eye enhanced by the cleverest art of the make-up box, and set off by daring line and colour of gown, could do to make her wondrous to look upon, had been achieved. All that a deep excitement, a complete confidence in what her mirror had told her, a surety of at least a measure of real histrionic power, could give in aid of the finished effect, was there. But as she came very quietly upon the stage there was

nothing at all in her bearing to indicate that she thought herself a form of delight, rather did she suggest that she was dreading her difficult rôle, and not at all confident that she could hope even to please the eye. Tom, indeed, could have sworn that this was so. Had he not held a brief but satisfying dialogue with her on the way upstairs?

"Oh, Tom!" she had called, "is it really time to go on? I'm so frightened! Do you suppose I can ever do it as Mr. Ray wants it done?

Tom, gazing his eyes out at her lovely shoulders, as she preceded him along the narrow corridor to the stairs, keeping her scarlet silken skirts well away from the walls—he helped her solicitously in that—answered in eager assurance: "Why, of course you can! And—my word!—looking at you would be enough, if you couldn't act at all. My word! I never *saw* you——"

"Oh, but Tom, *looking* a part is nothing—and I'm not even sure I can do that. But *acting* it! That's another story. And you're so wonderful in yours——"

"Me? Why, I just have to die! That's easy!"

"But you do it so realistically—you're absolutely true to life. When I bend over you—yes, I do feel that you're actually my brother, and my heart—— Well, if that can help, you do help me. And I'll do my best. But—I'm simply scared to pieces. Feel my hand, it's freezing!" She stretched back one bare arm, and Tom willingly caught her hand in his. His own was so cold it is doubtful if he could have detected chill in hers, but he held it fast, chafing it in both his own, and murmuring tenderly: "You'll be all right, I know you will. Why, you'll have the audience from the minute you go on—they can't get away from you—any more than I can!" The last was a whisper.

Fanny turned. They were at the top of the stairway

now, with the wings close at hand. "Tom, tell me! Do you really think I can do it? Will you just keep thinking about me every minute while you're lying there?" She pressed one hand over her heart with a little gesture of fear which simply finished Tom. "Oh, if it *would* stop beating so fast——"

Tom slipped his arm about her shoulders. "Don't be afraid, dear," was what he began to say. But she was away from him in an instant, and he could only recall with tingling pulses that instant's touch in which at least two of his fingers had come into fleeting contact with the satiny bare arm. The next minute he had rallied and rushed after her upon the stage, to watch with a jealous pleasure the looks which fell upon her from all sides.

At sight of the "star" Cary Ray came forward. All he said was, "I'm mighty glad you're here, Miss Fitch. Real actresses never can be depended upon, you know—and you certainly look temperamental enough to give your stage manager some trouble!" But his eyes and his smile said that he was well satisfied with her as a member of his caste, and that as a girl of his acquaintance he was immensely glad he knew her. There was promise in Cary's look as well. All Fanny had to do now was to play that part as she knew she could play it, and Cary Ray would fall before her. Going out to take a drink, after the play should be over—the thing he would naturally want most to do—would pale into insignificance before the stimulus she could offer him, if she but let him take her home and come in for an hour's talk and coffee by the fire.

But Tom Lockhart and Cary Ray were not the stakes for which Fanny Fitch meant to play that night. There was a tall figure in the wings of which she was well aware,

and though she did not look toward it she was very sure that Robert Black was watching her. How, indeed, could he do anything else? Belgian orphans, ambulance drivers, French officers, Englishwomen, Red Cross nurses—how could they all be anything but a background for the lovely "star?" Does not the eye watch the point of high light in any scene?

And then they were all in their places. Cary rushed about giving last warnings, the orchestra music dropped to a low murmur of mystery, and the curtain rose. Black, with a last word to the waiting children, slipped out of the wings, down the stairs, up through the orchestra door, and into a seat held for him by a group of young men who were now his special friends. It was Cary's expressed wish that he should see the play from the front, and then come back, with the falling of the curtain, to tell the amateur actor-manager how it had gone.

No need to relate the whole story of the play. It is not with the stage performance that we are most concerned, but with that other play, quite out of sight of the audience in the little theatre that night, which is to us more interesting than the scenes they acted behind the footlights. The stage play dealt with one of those thrilling situations with which we have all since then, through printed page and photograph and drama, become familiar. We know now how those who went across to help, months —a year—two years—before America came into the war, felt about us who lagged behind. The young American ambulance drivers who left their colleges and rushed over because they couldn't stand it that we weren't remembering our debt to France, and who threw themselves and all they had to give into the breach, angry and proud and absolutely forgetful of self, just to do their little part—

these had Cary pictured in his play, chafing with impatience because they couldn't make all America understand and care. The American girl whose schooldays had been spent in Paris, who had many friends there, and who wanted to put aside everything promised her at home and go back to the country she had learned to love, to nurse the Frenchmen who since the war began had taught her what true gallantry might be—Cary had sketched her in his rarest colours, a thing of beauty and of love, her heart as tender as her spirit was dauntless.

There was the American surgeon, come over at first because he wanted to study the methods of the French and English surgeons, but staying out of sheer pity, and grimly working now to the last limit of his endurance, unwilling to desert while the need was so great, calling with every eloquent word he could find time to write back to his brothers in the profession to come and help him stay the flood of suffering. Drivers and nurses and doctors—these were the characters whom Cary had chosen with which to make his appeal to the laggard nation of us at home.

The Englishwoman, the Belgian mother with her little starving children, the French officer, the dying French poilu—these were the foils for the actress, torn from her stage by a message brought by one of the American ambulance men to the hospital that her brother was passing. It was her part to create the scene with which to stir the blood, hers to cry to the French officer: "Why are the Americans not here to prevent his dying? Did not our Lafayette and his men go to them at their call? Does America owe us nothing, then? See, he is only a boy—too young to die! Could they not have made it impossible?"

Well, Fanny did it gloriously. All that had gone before led up to her entrance, her gorgeous fur-lined cloak slipping from her shoulders, her eyes imploring surgeon and nurses to say that the boy was not yet gone. When she fell upon her knees beside the cot where lay the limp figure of the brother she was a figure to draw every eye and thought. All the colour, all the light of the scene seemed to centre in her, the bare hospital ward and the people in it turning instantly to a dull background for her extravagant beauty, her enchanting outlines, her anguish of spirit, her heroic effort—after that one accusing cry—at composure. It was impossible not to say that here was amateur acting of a remarkable and compelling sort. If the pounding heartbeats of the supposedly dying soldier under his torn uniform might have been taken as an index of the pulses of the audience, the general average must have been that of high acceleration under the spell of Cary's art and Fanny's cleverness.

Could it be called more than cleverness? Robert Black was wondering, as he watched her from down in front. Of course he watched her, he would have been hardly human if he had not, or if he had not also come, for the moment, at least, under her spell. Cleverness or real dramatic power—it was difficult to judge, as it is always difficult when the eyes are irresistibly attracted by fascination of face and form. In her dress Fanny had copied to the life the extravagantly revealing outlines of a certain daring and popular vaudeville actress. When Nan Lockhart had suggested that for the conservative American suburb a trifle less frank a showing might be better taste Fanny had laughed and shrugged her shoulders, and said she didn't intend to spoil the part by prudery. She vowed that Cary Ray was the sort who would be furious with

her if she came to his stage looking like a modest maiden on her day of graduation from school! "He's no infant prodigy," she had added, "he's a full-grown man-genius, and I'm going to play up to him. Just watch me get away with it!"

She was getting away with it. Even Nan—who had wanted to shake her from the moment of her first entrance with that effect of being shyly reluctant to appear at all—had to admit that Fanny had the audience in the hollow of her pretty hand, not to mention the male portion of her fellow actors, and, yes, even herself, as well. It was impossible for Nan not to be fond of Fanny, and to forgive her many of her sins, because of her personal charm and her originality of speech and action. Whatever else she was, no doubt but Fanny was always interesting. Generous Nan was more than glad to have her friend distinguish herself to-night, and looked on from her own unexacting rôle, with a full pride in Fanny's achievement.

There arrived a moment in the play, however, when to the discerning there came a sudden shifting of the honours. It was almost at the last, when the scourging indictment of the French actress had reached its height. It was then, when the silence following her bitter cry had continued till it had become painful, that the ambulance drivers and the surgeon and nurse one by one came forward, till they had surrounded the weeping Frenchwoman. Then the nurse touched her on the shoulder:

"Madame," she said, "see. *We* are Americans!"

The actress looked up. The youngest of the drivers was bending a little toward her—a tall, slim boy, with his left sleeve torn, a long cut down his cheek.

"It's a damned shame!" he said.

The other drivers clenched their fists, murmuring fierce

assent. The surgeon drew his hand across his tired eyes—one could see that they were blurred. The nurse, her eyes deep and wonderful with pity, put her arm about the bare, shaking shoulders:

"America will come," she said—and her eyes seemed to look across the sea. "She *must* come—and when she does——"

"Too late—for him!" The actress's hand pointed accusingly at the still form on the cot.

"Yes, too late for him. Too late for much—but not too late for all. Meanwhile, Madame—*we* are here—*and we care!*"

"You bet we do!" It was the youngest driver.

"Your brother was a peach of a chap," declared another, and gently the audience down in front smiled while it wiped its eyes.

"A peasch?" Fanny's little puzzled accent was perfect.

"A hero, Madame—the bravest of the brave," the nurse explained.

"Then—I am content!" The gesture was superb. The glittering eyes of the actress looked out over the audience, then lowered suddenly, to rest for one instant on Robert Black. It was an error, and a fatal one, if to nobody but him. Up to that moment she had had him—at that moment she lost him as an enthralled spectator. The little self-conscious action broke the spell she had woven. His gaze left her and rested upon Jane. And there it found—what made him say to himself, suddenly enraged with his own lack of discrimination:

"Have I forgotten to watch *you*—in watching *her?* Shame on me! She's only acting. You are—*real!*"

His eyes, through the remaining moments of the play, never again left Jane. Now that the dazzling light no

longer blinded his vision he could see the beauty which had needed neither over-enhancing make-up nor ravishing costume to set it forth. In the plain white of the nurse's dress, with the nun-like head-veil so trying in its austerity, her face full of the exquisite compassion which is the hall-mark of the profession, Jane was now for him the central figure. And when the actress had left the stage, the cot with its still figure had been removed, and the five Americans had returned for their final scene, the simple humanness of it somehow "got over," as the phrase is, so completely that in its own way it far outshone the splendour of the tragedy that had preceded it. And this was the sure mark of Cary's art, that he had dared to close with this.

"The thing that gets me"—it was the youngest ambulance driver again—"is how the devil we're ever going to make 'em see it back home—till it's too late, same as she said."

The tired surgeon lifted his head. "I would go home and make some speeches," he said, "if I could get away. But if I go—who'll do my job here?"

"It will take ten men," said the nurse, simply.

He looked at her, and his grim smile touched his lips. "Twenty nurses to fill your little shoes," he retorted.

"*Little* shoes?" The second ambulance driver looked down at them. "They *are* darned little, but it *would* take twenty nurses, at that!"

"America's *got* to come!" spoke the third driver—a fair-haired boy with a fresh, tanned face. "Gee, she's *got* to come, or I'll turn Frenchman, for one. I can't stand it any longer. Money and munitions—and food—that's what they write—and we ought to be satisfied. Satisfied! *Men*—why don't they send *men?* Why don't they *come*

—millions of 'em! Oh, it's hell to have to be ashamed of your own country!"

"She will come!" It was the nurse. She stood up. Her eyes looked out again across the seas. "I see her coming." She stretched out her arms. Behind her the four men, the tired surgeon and the boyish ambulance drivers, lifted their heads and stretched out their arms, too. The girl's voice rang out:

"O America!—*Come*—before it is forever too late!"

The curtain fell. A murmur came from the audience—the delayed applause rose, and rose again —then died away. People got up, some triumphant, some uncertainly smiling, others dark of brow. The young men beside Black were aflame with the fire of that last challenge; their eyes looked as if they were seeing new and strange things. When he could get away from them Black pulled himself together, dived through the orchestra door and came upon the stage. He went first to Jane Ray.

"Will you let me take you home when you are ready?" he asked, very low. "I'll tell you—then."

She nodded and turned away. He had seen her eyes—they plainly showed that they had been wet with tears.

He shook hands with Cary Ray, who smiled at him, and spoke rather deliriously. "We put it over, didn't we? You don't have to tell me. I can read the human countenance. Are you going to start across to-night—or will morning do?"

"You gripped us all, Cary. Don't expect me to talk about it—just yet."

"All right—that's enough. Here's the girl who did the trick." And he put out his hands to Fanny Fitch.

Only Nan could have told how Fanny had done it, but

somehow already she had managed to get rid of so much of her make-up as was intended to reach across the footlights, and that which remained was not so perceptible that it made her look the painted lady. She was a siren now, was Fanny, and a dangerously happy one. The effect of her had become that of a radiant girl who enjoys a well-earned triumph, of which the great masses of orchids and roses she was now carrying were the fitting sign.

"You scored a great success," said Robert Black. He was not afraid now to look at Fanny at close range; there had been one moment in the play when he had thought he might well be afraid, realizing acutely that he was only human, after all, and had no stronger defenses than other men. His glance met hers coolly. "I congratulate you very heartily."

"Oh, I'm glad you liked me," she answered, and her voice was thrillingly low. "It means so much to me—to please *you!* I was afraid I could never do that—your discrimination is so fine. You would have known if I had not really felt the part. I did—it seemed to me I simply lived in that French actress's body. It was a tremendous experience really. I can never, never forget it."

"Wasn't she glorious?" Cary's tense voice broke in. He had not moved away. "I believe I must have written the thing for her without ever having seen her. But I've seen her now!" His fiery gaze devoured her, his thin cheek flushed more deeply than before. Suddenly Black was acutely aware of a new source of anxiety for Cary. What would Fanny Fitch do with him, he wondered. "Listen," Cary went on hurriedly. "I'm going to have a bit of a supper over at the hotel—this event has got to be celebrated somehow. I've had Tom telephone over, and they'll get a few eats and things together for us in a hurry.

Anyhow, we can work off a little of the high pressure that way—and it's got to be worked off, or a maniac like me can't keep his head till morning. You'll join us, of course, Mr. Black?"

"I'll go over, and take your sister, but I can't stay. You won't need me—and I haven't been an actor, so I'm naturally not in on it. Thank you just the same, Cary."

"Sure thing you're in on it—nobody more so—we won't let you off. Nail him for me, will you, Miss Fitch?" and Cary rushed away.

"Why, it will be no celebration at all without you!" breathed Fanny Fitch, with a glance which would certainly have turned Tom Lockhart crazy. Black felt himself proof against it, even though his eyes told him that it was worth getting if a man had a taste for that sort of thing. She went on quickly: "You won't make us—I don't mind saying you won't make me, personally—so unhappy?"

"I'm sure you won't be that, Miss Fitch, with all your fellow actors to tell you how skillful your acting was."

"Skillful! Oh, but I don't like that word!"

"Why not? All acting means skill, doesn't it?"

"But—if you didn't see more than that in it—I shall be dreadfully hurt, Mr. Black. I meant to put—my heart into it! It was such a wonderful play—it deserved no less than that, did it?"

"No less. And had no less from you all, I think."

"Oh, they were all splendid!" agreed Fanny, rallying instantly to this call. "Miss Ray was perfect, especially. Of course she had the glorious advantage of the last word—and how effectively she used it! *There* was skill for you, indeed. I didn't know Miss Ray was so clever!"

"That's generous of you," said Black—and if there was

only a half-veiled irony in his tone now, Fanny didn't recognize it. The ambulance drivers were hovering close, waiting for their chance. Black got away at length, and it was with a curious sense of contentment that he listened to something Mrs. Red Pepper Burns was saying as he passed her: "Each one took his or her part tellingly, but of course the honours rest with Miss Ray. She didn't act, she *was* that American girl summoning us all. I can hear that last call yet!"

"My jolly, so can I!" Red's lips shut together in a tight line.

Black now did his best managing. He wasn't specially good at it, it being rather a new part for him to play, where women were concerned. He was much more accustomed to maneuvering to escape a too persistent encouragement of his society than deliberately to planning to get somebody to himself. His idea just now was that if he could only take Jane away before the rest had started for the hotel, a few blocks down the street, he might secure the short walk with her alone. He had discovered that it was raining, one of those late March rains which melt the lingering snow from the streets, the air mild, the suggestion of coming spring hinting strongly in the very feel of the air. Cary was announcing that motors would soon be at hand to take everybody—he wanted them all to remain in costume, just for fun. Black must be quick now if he would secure the thing he found he wanted very much indeed.

"Miss Ray, don't you want to walk instead of ride? I warn you that it's raining, but wouldn't the walk be good for you, after all this heat and strain?"

Jane turned to him. She had put on a long belted coat over her white uniform; she still wore her nurse's veil-cap.

"Oh, yes!" she answered, quickly. "It's just what I want most."

"Then come—now, if you can. I'll tell Tom to explain to your brother. He'll forgive us—he'll forgive anything to-night."

They slipped away, and only Red's quick eye saw them go. He said nothing to anybody—why should he? He knew Robert Black too well, by now, not to understand why he felt like getting away, and not to be entirely in sympathy with his wanting to go with Jane Ray. He felt like that himself—he didn't want to go to anybody's supper party. But he knew that Cary must be allowed to let down gradually to-night, and he knew that he was the one to stand by, as he meant to do. Black had done it far oftener than he.

Down in the street, with the first touch of the wet, mild air upon her hot cheek, Jane drew a long, refreshed breath.

"Oh, that's so good," she said.

"Isn't it? Somehow I knew it was what you needed after that. Do you know what you did to us?"

"I don't know what I did to anybody," she said, "except myself."

"*I* know."

They walked in silence, after these few words, for a full block. Black held the umbrella low—it was a large umbrella, and sheltered them both very well. He had offered Jane his arm—it is difficult for two people to keep sufficiently close together under an umbrella not to get wet unless one takes the other's arm. She had not taken it, but she had gripped a fold of cloth on the under part of his sleeve, and this held her securely in place. He could just feel that slightest of contacts, and it gave him an odd sense of comradeship.

The silence was grateful to them both, as silence may be between two people each of whom understands a good deal of what the other is thinking. When Jane broke it, at the end of the second block, it was with an unconscious security that she could go on from where she had left off, without explaining the gap.

"I've got to go," she said, in a tense voice. "I knew that, when I took the part, or I couldn't have dared to take it."

"I knew you must be feeling that way. I understand. So am I."

She looked up quickly. "Oh! Shall you go?"

"Of course."

"At once?"

"I am in a sense bound to my church—until my first year here is up, at least. It will be up in April. If war isn't declared by that time I shall go, whether the church is willing to send me or not."

"I can't wait," said Jane, "till America is in, unless she is in before I can get away. Cary can't, either. He is going to try to get a berth at once, as correspondent for his old paper. He has sent them this play—it ought to show them that he is—at work again and that—his brain is clear. He's physically pretty fit now, I think."

"That's great. And how will you go?"

"I don't know yet—I'll find a way. All I know is, I can't stand it another day not to be getting ready. There'll be some place for me—there must be."

"I don't question it." He looked down at that sweet, sturdy profile outlined now against the many lights of the small downtown park they were passing. "Yes, they'll find a place for you. I wish I could be as sure of the one I want."

"You?" Jane looked quickly up at him, and their eyes met. "You want a commission?"

"Yes. I want a chaplaincy."

"Oh!" Her tone showed deep disappointment. "I knew you were all on fire about the war, but I did think you——"

"Would want a bigger job?"

"Yes!"

"I don't know of any," he said, steadily.

"How can you feel that way—how can you? A chaplain doesn't bear arms—doesn't go to the front—stays in safe places——" Her fingers let go of his sleeve, she walked alone.

"The sort of chaplain I mean," said Black—with a biting sense of injury at his heart—"does bear arms. He does go to the front. He never stays in safe places if he can by any chance get out of them. Will you please—take that back? I don't think I can bear it—from you."

She looked up at him again, and again he looked down at her. She saw the pain in his eyes, saw the virility in his lean, strong face, the way his jaw set and his lips compressed themselves in the line that speaks determination, and was ashamed—and convinced.

"I take it back," she said. "You couldn't be anything but a fighting man wherever they put you. I ought to know, by the way you have fought for my brother. Forgive me."

He was silent for a minute. Then he said slowly: "The next time you come on a list of citations for distinguished bravery, over there, would you mind reading it carefully? And when you come to a chaplain's name, notice what he did to deserve it. That's all I ask."

"I'm sorry," Jane said softly. "I suppose I don't know the facts."

"I imagine you don't, Miss Ray."

"You're still angry with me. I can't blame you."

"I'm not angry. But I do care that the splendid fellows over there who wear the cross on the collar of their tunic should never be spoken of as if they were looking for safe places. If I can take my place among them I'll want no higher honour—and no more dangerous work than they take upon themselves."

Jane's fingers laid hold of the fold of his coat-sleeve again. She bit her lip. Then she said gently:

"I asked to be forgiven. Isn't it a part of your office to forgive the repentant?"

He was staring straight ahead, and this time it was she who looked at a profile; stern and hard she thought it for a minute. Then the set lips relaxed, and a deep breath came through them. "I seem to care too much what you think," he acknowledged. "It doesn't matter, I suppose, what you do think. Never mind."

"But I've apologized."

"You haven't changed your feeling about it. I'm not looking for a personal apology. It's all right. Tell me—when do you think you can get off?"

Jane stopped short. The pair were in a side street, and there were no pedestrians upon it within a considerable distance. "Mr. Robert Black," she said, "I'll not go another foot with you till you are friends with me again."

"Friends with you?" He seemed to consider the question. "Having once been your friend—how can I ever be anything else—unless you tell me I can't be? But even friends can—fail to see."

"I don't fail to see. I see very clearly—quite suddenly.

And—if we are both going over, in the same cause, we must keep on being friends. I think—"Jane's voice held a peculiar vibration—"I think, before I am through with it, I may be very glad to have—a chaplain—for a friend!"

Robert Black looked at her steadily for a moment. His lips broke into a smile; she could see his splendid white teeth between the pleasant lines. "Ah, you do make full amends!" he admitted. "I—shall we——" Then he glanced up and down the street. He began to laugh. "Where is that hotel?" he queried.

Jane's eyes scanned the street corners ahead and behind them. "I think we've gone by it," she said, with mirth.

"Then—let's go a little farther by. Do you mind? Mayn't we go to that big building down there, before we turn around? It's not raining so very hard now. I hate to take leave of you—just yet. It seems a poor place to stop—when we've just got back to—the place we started at."

"And what was the place we started at?" She let him take her forward again. He was walking more and more slowly. It looked as if a good deal of time might possibly be consumed before they should reach the designated building and then retrace their steps to the patiently waiting hotel.

"The place where we were both going to war. Do you realize what a meeting ground that is?"

She nodded. "It is—quite a meeting ground. It seems to——" she hesitated. He repeated the words with the rising inflection. She shook her head.

"I can finish it for you," he said. "It seems to—set us apart, just a little—from the rest. At least—till they say

they are going, too. Some of them will say that very soon. Till they do—do you mind being—in a little clear space—just with me—and with this big thing ahead to talk about together?"

It was a minute before Jane answered. When she did, it was in the frankest, sweet way that she said straightforwardly, "No, I don't mind, Mr. Black. I think I—rather like it. You see, you're not—poor company!"

Though they went on from there on that note of frank friendliness, finished the walk, came finally to the hotel, parted with the simplest sort of comradely good-night, there could be no question that the bond between them, till now established wholly on the basis of Black's friendship for Cary, had become something which was from Cary quite apart. Whatever it was, it took Robert Black a good three miles of walking alone in a rain which had all at once become a downpour to think it out, and wonder, with a quickening of the pulses, where it led.

CHAPTER XI

A LONG APRIL NIGHT

"LET a fellow in? Oh—sorry! Did I wake you up?" Black looked up, dazedly. It struck him that Red didn't appear particularly sorry, in spite of his brusque apology. The red-headed doctor stood just within the minister's study door, bearing all the appearance of one who comes on the wings of some consuming enthusiasm.

Black pushed a number of sheets of closely written paper under a convenient magazine. He ran his hand across his forehead, thrusting back dark locks more or less in disarray. His eyes were undeniably heavy.

"Come in—do! Have a seat. Let me take your coat."

"Thanks. You look in the dumps. Somebody been flaying you alive?"

Black smiled a little wanly. "No. I rather wish they had. It might give me something to think about. What is it? You are full of some news—I can see that. Did you do me the honour of coming to tell me about it?"

Red laughed. "That's like you. Anybody else would have left me to get around to it gradually, if he'd even noticed that I seemed to be bursting with news. Well, I am. And I had to blow off to somebody right now. Saw your light and knew you were mulling over some self-appointed task at this unholy hour. Thought it would probably be good for you to turn your attention to a fellow-sufferer."

Black's sombre eyes rested intently on Red's face. Red had thrown his hat upon one chair, his motoring coat upon another, and had seated himself astride of a straight and formal manse chair, facing its back. His face was deeply flushed; his eyes held all manner of excited lights.

"You're no sufferer," was Black's decision. "What is it? You're not—off for the war?"

"You've got it. That's exactly what I am. Had a cable half an hour ago from my friend Leaver at the American Hospital at N——. He says come along as fast as I can get there. He can use me, or have me sent to the front line, as I prefer. If Jack Leaver says come, that settles it. I'll go as quick as I can get my affairs in order, take my physical tests, have my inoculations, and put through my passports. How's that?"

"It's great. Of course you'll get to the front as fast as possible—I know you. I congratulate you—heartily." Black got up and came over, his hand out. Red seized it. He hung onto it, looking up into Black's face.

"Come on, too!" he challenged.

"I wish I could. I can't—yet."

Red dropped the hand—or would have dropped it if it had not been withdrawn before he had the chance. He scowled.

"Why not?"

"Because I can't get the place I want till war is declared and we begin to send men. I'll wait for that."

"That means months, even if Congress loses no more time."

"You know better. Our regulars will go mighty soon after we declare war. I'll find my place with them."

"And what's the place you want?"

Black looked at him steadily. "You know, don't you?"

Red nodded, grimly. "I suppose I do. Tom told me—but I wouldn't believe it. Look here, man! Give up that fool notion that you've got to stick to your cloth, and go in for a man's job. Come over with me and enlist in one of your Scottish regiments—that's the place for you. Then you'll see the real thing. You've got the stuff in you."

Black's face was going slowly white. "I'm an American. When I go I'm going as chaplain of an American regiment."

"Oh, wnat damned rot!"

Red Pepper Burns was powerfully overwrought, or he wouldn't have said it. The next instant he realized what he had said, for the lithe figure before him had straightened and stiffened as if Red had brought the flat of his hand against the other man's cheek. At the same instant a voice cold with wrath said with a deadly quiet command in the ring of it: "Take that back, Doctor Burns."

"I take back the word, if you like—but not the thought. I can't do that. A chaplaincy isn't a man's job—not a young man's job. Plenty of old priests and middle-aged parsons to look after the dying. A good right arm like yours should carry a rifle. I'd rather see you stay out of it altogether than go in for the army-cut petticoats of your profession."

Then indeed Red saw a strange sight. He had seen many men angry in his time; he now saw one angrier than he would have believed possible without an outburst of profanity. Black grew so pale he might have been going to faint if the glitter in his black eyes hadn't told the tale of a vitality which was simply taking it out that way instead of by showing red, as most men do. He opened his lips once and closed them again. He raised his right hand

and slowly clenched it, looking down at it, while Red watched him curiously. At last he spoke, in a strange, low voice, still looking at that right hand of his:

"I never wanted anything in my life so much as to knock you down—for that," he said; and then his eyes went from his clenched fist to look straight into Red's.

"Why don't you do it? I give you leave. It *was* an insult—I admit it—the second one. But I don't take it back. It's what I think—honestly. If you don't like it, it's up to you to prove yourself of a different calibre."

Red still sat astride of his chair, watching Black, whose gaze had gone back to that right hand of his. He opened and closed it again—and once more, and then he spoke.

"Doctor Burns," he said, slowly, "I don't think I have to take this sort of thing from you—and I don't think I will." He walked over to his study door, opened it, and stood there waiting, like a figure cut out of stone. Red leaped to his feet, his own eyes snapping.

"By jolly!" he shouted, seizing his hat and coat. "I don't have to be shown the door twice!" And he strode across the floor. As he came up to Black the two pairs of eyes met again. Anything sadder than the look now in Black's, overriding his anger, Red never had seen. It almost made him pause—not quite. He went along out and the door closed quietly behind him.

In the hall a plump, middle-aged figure was coming toward him. Anxiety was written large on Mrs. Hodder's austerely motherly face. He would have gone by her with a nod, but she put out a hand to stop him, and spoke in a whisper:

"I hope, Doctor, you cheered him up a little. Poor man—I never saw him so down."

Red grunted. "No—I'm afraid I didn't cheer him up

much," he admitted, gruffly. "He wasn't in any mood to be cheered."

"No, indeed. A body can't get over such news as he had to-day in a hurry. He hasn't eat a mouthful since he heard."

"What?" Red paused, in the very act of pushing on past her detaining hand. "Bad news, you say?"

"Why, yes—didn't he tell you? He told me. Two of his sister's sons are killed—and she only had three, and all in this awful war. Killed almost together, they were. He showed me their pictures—the likeliest looking boys—one looks something like Mr. Black himself. Why, I can't think why he didn't tell you, and him so terrible cut up about it."

Red wheeled, and looked back at the closed study door. He looked again at Mrs. Hodder. "I'm glad you told me," he said almost under his breath. "I think I'll—go back."

He went back, pausing a minute at the door before he opened it. Then he turned the knob softly, as if a very sick patient were lying within. He went in noiselessly, as doctors do, his eyes upon the figure seated again at the desk, its head down upon its folded arms. He crossed over to the desk, and laid his hand on Black's right arm.

"I'm sorry, lad," he said. "I didn't know."

Black raised his head, and now Red's eyes saw what they had not seen before—the ravages of a real grief. The red-headed doctor was the possessor of rather the largest heart known to man, and it was that heart which now took command of his words and acts.

"I didn't know, Black," Red repeated.

"How do you know now?"

"Mrs. Hodder told me. A curse on me for hitting you when you were down."

After a minute Black's hand reached for the thin sheets of closely written paper which he had pushed under the magazine when Red had first entered. He looked them over rapidly, then pointed to a paragraph. Red scanned it as quickly as the unfamiliar handwriting would permit. As he read he gave a low ejaculation or two, eloquent of the impression made upon him.

"You may be proud of them," he said, heartily. "And —they were of your blood. I don't think I need question its virility. I guess I'd best leave it to you to decide what's your course—and not butt in with my snap judgments."

Black looked up. "Thank you, Doctor Burns," he said, "for coming back."

"Forget what I said—will you?"

"I don't think I can—right away. It doesn't matter."

"It does matter—when you're down and out with getting a letter like that. If I hadn't been so hot with my own affairs I'd have seen for myself something'd happened."

"It's all right, Doctor." Black rose wearily. "Some day I'm going to make you think differently. Until then—perhaps we'll do better not to talk about it. I'm glad you're going—I envy you. Let's let it go at that, for to-night."

Red held out his hand. "You'll shake hands?"

"Of course."

Somehow as he went away Red was feeling sorrier than he would have believed possible that anything had happened to make that handshake what he had felt it—a purely formal and perfunctory one. Why had he said those blamed mean things to Black about his profession, he wondered. Confound his red head and his impudent tongue! He liked Robert Black, liked him a lot, and better and better all the time; trusted him, too—he realized,

that. He had rushed into the manse study to-night from a genuine impulse to tell his good news to the man from whom he was surest of understanding and sympathy with his own riotous joy over his great luck in getting the chance to go across. And then he'd had to go and cut the fellow where he was already wide open with his own private sorrow! If there had been any way in which Red could have made it up to his friend—yes, Black had become his friend, no doubt of it, to rather an unanticipated degree—if there had been any way in which he could have made it up to him, taken the sting out of the hard words, and sent the "lad" to bed feeling that somebody besides his housekeeper cared that he was unhappy—well, Red would have given considerable, as he went away, to have done that thing. But there wasn't any way. There hardly ever is.

If he had known just what he left behind him, in that manse study, undoubtedly Red would have been sorrier yet—if he could have fully understood it. It is possible that he could not just have understood, not having been made of quite the same fibre as the other man. What he would have understood, if he had chanced to see Black at about the third watch of the night, would have been that he was passing through some experience more tremendous than that which any loss of kin could possibly have brought him. The facts in the case were that, all unwittingly, Red Pepper Burns, with a few hasty words, had brought upon Robert Black the darkest hours he thus far had had to live through.

It tackled him shortly after Red had left—the thought which would not down—or, rather, the first of the two thoughts, for there were two with which he had to wrestle that long April night. It leaped at him suddenly, that

first thought, and in an instant, it had him by the throat. Why not admit that Red was right, that the average chaplaincy in the army or navy was a soft, safe job, and not an honoured one at all? Why not let everything else go, resign his church, go back to Scotland, look up men of influence he knew there, and try for a commission? Why not? Why not—— *Why not?*

Would that mean that he would leave the ministry—permanently? More than likely it would. Well, what if it did? Could anything be better worth doing now than offering his life in the Great War? Why stay here, preaching flaming sentiment to a congregation who mostly thought him overwrought upon the whole subject? Why stay here, holding futile committee meetings, arguing ways and means with hard-headed business men who were everlastingly thinking him visionary and impractical? Why go on calling on old ladies and sick people—christening babies—reading funeral services—marrying people who would more than likely be better single? Why go on with the whole round of parish work, he, a man of military age, a crack shot—he had not spent all those years in the South for nothing!—possessed of a strong right arm, a genius for leadership—when an older man could do all these things for these people, and release him for work an older man couldn't do? And if he were free——

Yes, it was here that his second temptation got in its startling work. If he were free—he would be free to do as other men did: marry a wife without regard to her peculiar fitness to be—a minister's wife! It wouldn't make any difference, then, if she never went to church, had no interest in any of the forms of religious life, didn't read her Bible—didn't even say her prayers when she went to bed—didn't do anything orthodox—as he was pretty

sure somebody he knew didn't. What did all that matter, anyhow, so her heart was clean—as he knew it was!

Black pushed his revolving chair back from his desk so violently that it nearly tipped over. He began to pace up and down the study floor, his hands shoved deep into his pockets, a tense frown between his brows. He walked and walked and walked, getting nowhere in his mental discussion precisely as he got nowhere in actual distance with all that marching. And suddenly the similarity between the two processes struck him, and he rushed into the hall, seized hat and coat, put them on as a man does who finds himself late for a train, and let himself out into the April night where the air was heavy with a gathering storm. It was precisely midnight by the sounding of a distant tower clock as the manse door closed behind him.

Do you happen to know, by any analogous experience, just what sort of a night Robert Black spent, alone with himself? If you do, no need to describe it to you. If you have never wrestled with a great spiritual temptation, beating it off again and again only to have it steal up and grip you more powerfully than before, then you can have no conception of what that night brought to Black. A concrete temptation—one to steal or rape or kill—can have no comparison in insidiously disarming power with one made up of forces which cannot be definitely assigned to the right side or the wrong. When the thing one wants to do can be made to seem the right thing, when Satan masks as an angel of light, and only a faint inner voice tells one insistently that his premises, his deductions, his conclusions, are every one false, then indeed does the struggle become a thing of increasing torture, compared with which physical distress is to be welcomed.

It was four in the morning when Black let himself into

the manse again, the light in his study seeming to him the only light there was left in the whole world, and that dim and unilluminating enough. Outside a heavy storm of wind had disabled the local electric service, and the streets for the last two hours had been dark as Erebus—and as Black's own thoughts. He had been grateful for that darkness for a time; then suddenly it had oppressed him unbearably and he had fled back to his home as swiftly as he had left it. There—there, in the room where he was used to think things out, was the place for him to come to his decision.

As he came in at the manse door the lights flashed on again. It was undeniably warm and bright there in his study, but his heavy heart took no comfort from this. It was a physical relief to be inside out of the storm, but the storm in his soul abated not a jot at sight of the familiar place. The very look of the study table, filled with matters of one sort or another pertaining to his work —his writing pad, his loose-leaf note-book, his leather sermon-holder, the row of books with which he had lately been working and which were therefore lined up between heavy book-ends for convenience in laying his hand upon them—somehow the sight of these gave him a sense of their littleness, their futility, compared with the things he had been seeing as he walked. A rifle, with a bayonet fixed and gleaming at its end; a Scottish uniform, with chevrons on the sleeve and insignia on the shoulder—a worn, soiled uniform at that; men all about, real men, who did not fuss over trifles nor make too much of anything, men with whom he could be friend or enemy as he desired —these were what Black saw. He saw also the two brave lads who had gone to their death, his own blood, who had been coming over shortly to follow his lead in the big coun-

try where he had found room to breathe, and whose untimely end he longed personally to avenge. And he saw —Jane Ray, over there, herself in service, meeting him somewhere, when both had done their part, and joining her life with his in some further service to mankind, social, reconstructive, unhampered by the bonds of any religious sect——

Oh, well—perhaps you can't see or feel it—perhaps to you the logical thing seems the very thing that so called to Robert Black. Why shouldn't he listen—why shouldn't he respond—why wasn't this the real thing, the big thing, and why shouldn't he dare to take it, and give God thanks that He had released him from too small, too cramped, too narrow a place of usefulness, into one which was bounded only by the edges of the great world of need? What was it that held him back—that so hardly held him back?

It was a little black-bound book which first began to turn the tide. It was lying on the study desk, pushed well back under some loose papers, but it was there all the time, and Black never once lost the remembrance that it was there. Again and again he wished it were not there, because he knew through it all that he could never settle the thing without reference to that little worn book. It was not the Bible, it was a ritual-book, containing all the forms of service in use in the Church to which Black belonged; it held, among others, the service for the ordination of ministers, and that very book had been used in the ordination of Black himself. As a man fighting to free himself from his marriage vows might struggle to turn his thoughts away from the remembrance of the solemn words he had once spoken, so did Black, in his present mood, strive to forget the very nearness at hand of that little book. And

yet, at last, as he had known he would, he seized and opened it. After all, were such vows as he had made irrevocable? Many a man had forsaken them, first and last. Had none of these deserters been justified?

Yet, as he went over and over it, that which hit him so heavily was not the language of the ordination vows which he had been evading and which now struck him full in his unwilling conscience, gravely binding though the phrases were. Nor was it that of the closing prayer, well though he remembered how the words had thrilled him, and had thrilled him ever since, whenever he read them over: "*Endue him with spiritual grace; help him perform the vow that he has made; and continuing faithful unto death may he at length receive the crown of life which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give him in that day.*" No, it was not these words which held his reluctant gaze fast at last, but others, which he had written into the small blank space at the top of the page whereon the service began.

Two years before he had had sudden and unexpected word of his mother's death on Easter Day—and the approaching Sunday would be Easter again. On that day, because she had been dear to him, and because he had been across the seas from her, he had written upon the page a renewal of his ordination vows. When he had been a little boy she had told him that some day she wanted him to be a minister of the Scottish Church, the Free Kirk of Scotland, in which she had been brought up. It had hurt her that he had wanted to go away to America, and though he had several times during the succeeding years crossed the ocean to see her, she had never quite recovered from the disappointment. On a strange impulse, that Easter Day, two years ago, knowing that he could never in this

world see her face again, he had taken up his pen and written upon the blank space these words:

BELOVED MOTHER:

This is the most precious thing I have in the world. I give it to you this Easter Day of your entrance into Heaven. These words were used at my ordination. I have said them over again to-day, because of your love for me, and my love for you. I shall keep them always.

ROBERT.

These, then, were the irrevocable words he could not take back. He had vowed to his God—he had promised his mother—— How shall a man take back such words? He had known all along it was unthinkable that he should, but his fight had been none the less tremendous for that—perhaps the more, for that. The tighter one feels the bonds that bind him, the harder is the struggle against them.

Black fell upon his knees before the old red-cushioned rocker which still held its place among the more dignified furnishings of the study. Somehow, it was this chair which was to him his Throne of Grace. He had not yet given up—it seemed to him he couldn't give up—but he had come to this, that he could take the attitude of prayer about it, instead of striding blindly through the silent streets, his own fierce will driving him on. And even as he knelt, there came before him with new and vivid colour, like a fascinating portrait on a screen, the face of Jane Ray. Thus far, to-night, he had succeeded mostly in keeping her in the background, at least till he should have decided his great question. But with her sudden return to the fore-front of his mental images came a new and startling thought: "If you went as she wants you to go, you might

marry her before you went. You might go together. But as a chaplain—you can only be her friend. Make love to her—wild love, and take her off her feet! Be human—you've every right."

At this he fairly leaped to his feet. And then began the very worst conflict of all, for this last thought was more than flesh and blood could stand. In his present mood, the exhaustion of the night's vigil beginning to tell heavily against his endurance, he was as vulnerable as mortal could well be. Since the night when he had seen Jane act in Cary's play and had taken her for the walk in the rain, her attraction for him had grown apace. He had not understood quite how it had grown till Red's words to-night had set his imagination aflame. The vision of his going soldiering had somehow kindled in him new fires of earthly longing, dropping his priesthood out of sight. Now, suddenly, he found himself all but a lover, of the most human sort, thinking with pulses leaping of marriage in haste, with the parting which must inevitably soon follow keying the whole wonderful experience to the highest pitch. It was the sort of imagining which, once indulged in for a moment, goes flying past all bounds and barriers, while the breath quickens and the blood races, and the man is all man, with other plans, other hopes, other aspirations forgot, in the rush of a desire so overwhelming that he can take no account of anything else in heaven or earth.

Small wonder, then, that Black should find he must have it out with himself all over again, nothing settled, even the little black-bound book in one mad moment dropped into a drawer and the drawer slammed shut. Not fair—*not fair*—to have to keep that book in sight! God Himself knew, He must know, that when He made man he made

him full of passions—for all sorts of splendid things—and perhaps the greatest of these were war—and love! How should a man be satisfied to be—a priest? No altar fire could burn brightly enough for him to warm his cold hands. As for his heart—it seemed to him just then that no priest's heart could ever be warm at all!

Could it not? Even as Black raged up and down his room, his hands clenched, his jaw hard set, his eyes fell upon a picture in the shadow—one he knew well. There had been a time when that picture had been one of his dearest possessions and had hung always above his desk. When he had come to his new church, and had been setting his new study in order, Tom had helped him hang his few pictures. It had been Tom who, glancing critically at this one, and seeing in it nothing to himself appealing—it was to him a dim and shadowy thing, of little colour and no significance—had hurriedly placed it over here, in this unlighted corner. Several times since Black had noted it there, and had said to himself that it was a shame for the beautiful thing to be so obscured—he must remove it to a better place and light, because he really cared much for it. But he had been busy—and careless—he had not removed it. And now, suddenly, it drew him. He went to it, took it from the wall, went over to the desk light with it. And then, as he looked, once again the miracle happened, and the spirit, the spirit which God Himself has set in every human creature, leaped up and triumphed over the flesh, and Black's fight was over—for that time. Not over forever, perhaps, but over for that time—which was enough.

Perhaps you know the picture—it is well known and much loved. A great cathedral nave stretches away into the distance, the altar in the far background streaming with

light, the choir gathered, the service on. The foreground of the picture is all in shadow, and in the depths of that shadow kneels one prostrate form in an abandon of anxiety or grief. Behind it, unseen, stands a wondrous, pitying, strongly supporting figure with hand outstretched, an aura of light about it, love and understanding emanating from it. Not with the crowd at the altar, but with the lonely human creature in the darkness, lingers the figure of the Lord. The words below are these: "*Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*"

Robert Black dropped upon his knees once more before the old red-cushioned chair, but not, now, with will rebellious against a too hard fate, a too rigorous necessity. The old loyalty, at sight of the picture which in past days of happy faith had meant so much to him, had sprung into life again as a flame, quenched but not put out, springs as the wind fans it. A sob came into his dry throat, his head went down upon his folded arms. His body relaxed; after a minute he no longer knelt, he had sunk upon the floor with his face pillowed against the red cushion in the chair-seat.

"O my Christ!" he said slowly aloud, "I give up. I couldn't do it for God—but I can for You! It was You I promised—I'll keep it—till the end! If I go to war, I'll go to carry—Your Cross! And if You'll let me, I'll carry it to the very front!"

Mrs. Hodder found him in the morning—though it was morning indeed when the fight was over. He had been asleep but an hour, there on the floor by the old red rocker, when she came briskly in to open the windows and give the manse study its usual early dusting and setting to rights. At sight of the desk light still burning dully in the pale daylight she looked astonished, and a moment later,

as she espied the figure on the floor by the chair, she started, frightened. Trembling she called the minister's name, stooping over him; but seeing at once the warm colour in his cheek, drew back with an agitated breath of relief.

"My land!" she murmured, "if the poor dear man ain't so beat out he's went to sleep right here on the floor. I always did know he'd kill himself if he kept rushin' around so, tryin' to be all things to all men—and all women. Seems like they couldn't think of enough things to ask him to do for 'em, besides all the things he thinks of himself. That bad news he got, too—likely that was what used him up."

"Yes," answered a very sleepy voice, when she had shaken the recumbent shoulder a little and called his name once or twice, "all right. Breakfast ready?"

"Not yet—but 'twill be, in a jiffy. Goodness me, Mr. Black, you certainly did give me a start! You must have been tired to death, to sleep all night on the floor, so."

Black got stiffly to his feet. "I'm all right. Listen—what's that?"

It was an early morning newsboy on the street outside, stridently calling: "*Extry—extry !*——" What followed was not distinguishable. Black, overcoming his stiffness of limb in a hurry, got to the outer door, whistled loudly, and secured a paper. When he came back all appearance of sleep or weariness had fled from him.

"We're in, Mrs. Hodder, we're in!" he was half shouting, and his tone thrilled his middle-aged housekeeper. Long afterward she was accustomed to say, when she told the story: "I knew from that minute where *he'd* be. We'd ought all have known it from the beginning, but I was so dumb I never sensed it till that morning when he come

back with the paper, callin' out so solemn—and yet so happy-like—'*We're in, Mrs. Hodder, we're in!*' says he. I guess he *was* in! That was a Saturday. And Sunday—he gave us the sign! My, but I'll never forget that!"

The sign! Yes, that was what Black did give. All day Saturday he was making possible the thing he had long before determined he would do when the hour came. From mill to shop he went, with orders and measurements; late on Saturday evening he came out of the Stone Church alone, locking the door behind him. His face was worn but not unhappy, and that night he slept like a tired child, his cheek upon his hand, his heart quiet and steady in his breast.

Next morning, when the people came into church, every eye turned startled to one spot. At the right of the pulpit, on the floor just below, lifted a straight and sturdy standard. From it hung the American flag, its silken folds motionless in the still air, yet seeming alive in the glory of its vivid colour. Above it hung the only flag which held the right to hang above the National emblem—that of the Church Militant, the pure white pennant with its cross of blue.

In a brief service Robert Black, his face showing red and white by turns with a restrained emotion he could not wholly conceal, dedicated the two flags, and his people had their first glimpse of what it might mean to him and them before it should all be over and peace again upon the earth. They couldn't know that to him the real dedication of the two flags had taken place the night before, when alone in the church he had lifted them into place and knelt before them, vowing anew his vow of allegiance and of service to God and country, a vow never again to be insecure upon his lips.

CHAPTER XII

EVERYBODY PLOTS

MAY I come in?"

Nan Lockhart hardly paused for permission to enter Fanny's room, so accustomed was she to share intimately with her friend most of her possessions, including rooms. Therefore she followed her knock and question with her entrance—and paused upon the threshold with a boyish whistle of surprise not unmixed with derision.

Fanny turned away from the long mirror with a little laugh. "Well, how do you like me in it?" she inquired.

"Oh, you're stunning, of course," Nan admitted. "Trying on all the different forms of war service, to see which is most becoming? You'll let that decide it, of course?"

"Certainly, Miss Cynic! And why not? Shouldn't a girl make the most of herself, under all conditions?"

Fanny had donned a white blouse and skirt, white shoes and stockings, and had pinned a white towel about her head. She had even gone to the trouble of cutting out a small red cross and fastening it upon the front of her headgear. The towel did not entirely cover her hair; engaging ringlets showed themselves about her small ears. She resembled a fascinating young nun except that in her eyes danced a most unconventual wickedness.

"This is merely stage play, I suppose?" Nan questioned

dryly. "You've no possible thought of offering your services, in towels or out of them?"

Fanny Fitch swung herself up to the footboard of her bed, and sat there, swinging her pretty feet. She smiled at her friend disarmingly; but Nan did not disarm under the smile.

"You're the most distrustful creature I ever knew, Nancy Lockhart. Don't you think I could get away with the nursing proposition? Smooth the fevered brow, and count the throbbing pulse, and charm the disordered brain back to sanity and calm? Read aloud to——"

"And wade around in floods of gore, and scrub the floor of the operating room, and keep on working when your back aches like fury, and get about four hours' sleep out of twenty-four? Wear your white uniform with the ward below fifty degrees—and zero outside? Game, are you, Fanny?"

"Bless my soul!—how terribly technical you sound! What do you know about it all?"

"More than you do, I'll wager. I've been reading about an American girl who has been in it for two years already. She '*wears the rue—with a difference*,' methinks, Fanny."

"Oh, well—I've got to get in it somehow," announced the wearer of the pseudo-uniform frankly. "Because, you know, my friend Robert Black is going, and I can't think with serenity of the wide Atlantic rolling between us. Of course there's just one way I'd like to go, and maybe I'll achieve that yet." Her eyes sparkled. "Ye gods, but wouldn't that be great! What'll you wager I go—that way?"

"What way?"

"As his—well—" Fanny seemed to be enjoying

herself intensely—"as his comrade-at-arms, you know—meaning, of course, his—comrade *in* arms. Oh-h!"—she gave the exclamation all the dramatic force it could hold, drawing it out with an effect of ecstasy—"Think of walking away with Robert McPherson Black from under the very eyes of his congregation—and of the demure but intriguing Jane!" And she threw both arms wide in a gesture of abandon, then clasped them across her breast, slipped down from the footboard, and fell at Nan's feet, looking up at her with beseeching eyes and an utter change of aspect. "Oh, please, my dearest dear, don't put any spokes in my wheel! Let me just imagine I'm doing something to bridge the chasm—the enormous chasm between us. It's a frightful thing to be so deeply, darkly, desperately in love as I am—and then to see your hero absorbed in plans to take himself away from you, out of your world, with never a look behind!"

"Fanny!"

"Oh, but I'll *make* him look behind—I will—I will! I'll turn those rapt black eyes of his back to the earth, earthy—or to the United States, United States-y—and to Fanny Fitch. And—I'll keep Jane Ray home if I have to put poison in her food."

"Fanny, get up!" Nan reached down and shook her friend's shoulders. "What on earth is the matter with you? Have you gone crazy?"

"I think so." Fanny buried her head in Nan's skirts, clasping her arms about the other's waist. "Raving crazy. I met Mr. Black on the street just now. He was rushing along with his wagon hitched to a star, by the look of him. He didn't even see me till he all but ran into me. Of course I had put myself in his way. Then he snatched off his hat, asked pardon and how I was, all

in the same breath—as if I had been one of his very oldest old ladies—and got away like a catapult. He was going in the direction of the station, I admit, but that wouldn't reasonably have prevented his exchanging a few friendly words with me. Oh, I can stand anything—anything—but having a man not even see me!"

"So I should judge, my dear, from past experience," Nan commented, grimly. She had put her arms rather reluctantly about Fanny, however; it was impossible not to see that something, at least, of this hysteria was caused by real feeling, if amazingly undisguised. She was quite accustomed to Fanny's self-revelations, and entirely used to taking them without seriousness. But in the present instance her sympathies were supplemented by her understanding of how it might be quite possible for a girl to lose her head over Robert Black without his being in the least responsible by personal word or deed. She now endeavoured to apply a remedy to the situation.

"Fanny," she said, "Mr. Black isn't thinking about anything just now but war, and how to get across. He has lost those fine young nephews, whom he expected to have come here when the war was over, and his mind is full of them. He hasn't a corner of his attention to give to women—any woman——"

"I've met him twice in the last week coming out of Jane Ray's. Of course Cary was with him one of the times, and Doctor Burns the other—but that doesn't mean he hadn't been confabbing with Jane. He's wise as a serpent, but I'm not at all sure he's harmless as a dove—he's much too clever to be seen paying attentions to any of us. He's always with some man—you can't get at him. And when he comes here he has Tom hanging round him every minute. Of course I know Tommy wants

to keep him away from me—but he appears to want to be kept away, so I can't so much as get a chance. If I could—— But—I *will!*"

Fanny sat back on her heels, wiping away a real tear with the corner of her towel.

"Of course you will, if you set out to do it. But—be careful, my dear. Robert Black can't be taken by storm."

"That's the one way he can be taken. I might plot and plan forever to make an impression on him in the ordinary ways—he's steel proof, I think, against those. The only way to get his attention is the way this war has got it—by shot and shell. If I can just somehow be badly wounded and fall down in his path, he'll—stoop and pick me up. And if he once finds me in his arms——"

"Oh, Fanny, Fanny! For heaven's sake don't try to play a game with him!" Nan spoke sternly. She removed herself by a pace or two from her friend, and stood aloof, her dark brows drawing together. "I know you're a born actress and can assume any part you like. That may be well enough in ordinary times—though I doubt it—but not in times like these. Don't go to war to play the old game of hitting hearts. You're not going to war—I know that—but don't pretend you want to. It isn't fair. This thing is one of life or death, and that's what's taking men like Doctor Burns and Mr. Black into it. They'll have no use for anybody who doesn't offer himself, body and soul. That's what Jane Ray is doing—but not you, you know. You just want—to marry a man."

"Oh, but you're hard!" Fanny got to her feet, moved over to the window and stood looking out, the picture of unhappiness. "Jane Ray, indeed! How does it happen you believe in her so fast? Why isn't she playing a game,

too?—Of course she is. But because her hair is smooth and dark, and her manner so sweetly poised, you take her at her own valuation. She's clever as Satan, and she'll put it over, I suppose. But why, just because I'm of a different type, I must be forever accused of acting——"

"My dear—I'm taking *you* at your own valuation. Haven't you explained to me exactly the part you intend to play—getting badly wounded and falling down in Robert Black's path——"

"You're so intensely literal!" Fanny spoke bitterly. "Heaven knows it will be no acting if I do get wounded. I'm wounded now—to the heart. And if I fall down in his path it'll be because I can't stand up. Last Sunday, when he stood there under the colours—who *wouldn't* have wanted him? Why, even you—" she turned to look full at Nan, with her reddened eyes searching Nan's grave face—"it wouldn't take an awful lot of imagination to put you in the same class with me, in spite of that wonderful grip you always keep on yourself. Honestly, now, can you tell me you wouldn't marry him, if he asked you?"

Annette Lockhart was not of those who turn scarlet or pale under cross-examination. Moreover, she was the daughter of Samuel Lockhart and had from him the ability to keep close hold of her emotions. She was entirely accustomed to facing down Fanny Fitch when she did not choose to reveal herself to her. Nevertheless, it may have cost her the effort of her life to answer neither too vehemently nor too nonchalantly this highly disconcerting question.

"You certainly must be a little mad to-day, my dear girl. Just because you are so hard hit, don't go to fancying that the woods are full of the slain. I like Mr. Black

very much, but I'm not a case for the stretcher bearers—nor likely to be. And just now I'm wanting so much to go myself, and know I can't possibly, because Tom will, and Father and Mother couldn't face our both going at once."

Fanny began suddenly to get out of her white apparel. "I'm going round to see Jane Ray," she announced, with one of the characteristic impulses to whose expression Nan was well used. "It's best to make friends with the enemy in this case, I think. And possibly I may meet Robert Black—coming out or going in under cover of a man friend. In that case I may receive one casual glance from His Eminence which will complete my undoing for to-day. That will surely be worth while." She laughed unhappily.

Half an hour afterward she walked into Jane Ray's shop. Her eyes were red no longer, her colour was charming, her manner was composed. When Jane was at liberty Fanny discussed "pie-crust" tables with her, declaring her intention to present something of the sort to Mrs. Lockhart.

"I've made such a terribly long visit," she explained, "and still they urge me to stay on. Of course it's wonderful for me—with my mother so far away. But I shall only stay till I can find out where to offer myself—if mother will just say I may go. Poor dear, she has such a horror of war—she may make it difficult for me. Meanwhile—I want to take every possible step, so I can have every argument to meet her with. If I could only go with someone—some other girl—she might feel differently about it."

"Yes, I should think that might help it," Jane agreed. Her dark eyes met Fanny's lustrous blue ones across the group of tables they had been considering. She was very

much on her guard now wherever Miss Fitch was concerned. The problem of the friendship between Nan Lockhart, whom Jane couldn't help liking and thoroughly trusting, and Fanny Fitch, whom she could somehow neither like nor trust, was one which she had as yet found no means of solving. Also, Cary's sudden and intense interest in Fanny had set his sister to studying the girl with new acuteness. Thus far she seemed to Jane all actress; it was becoming increasingly difficult not to suspect her constantly of being other than she seemed.

"And yet we all act, more or less," Jane said to herself honestly. "I'm acting this very minute, myself. I'm playing the part of one who is only politely interested in what she means to do, while I'm really crazily anxious that she shall not do certain things which involve Cary and me."

"I wonder if you would trust me with any of your own plans," Fanny said, engagingly. "I can't help knowing that you mean to go, and I'm sure you must have much real knowledge that I'm ignorant of. Is nursing the only thing a girl can do? You're not trained for that, are you? Forgive me—I'm not just curious, you know—I'm tremendously serious."

"My plans aren't fully worked out," Jane answered. "I have enough training to go as nurse's assistant, under the Red Cross."

"Oh, have you? How wonderful! Could I get that, do you suppose? I'm really a terribly quick study—I used to cram any amount of stuff in the forty-eight hours before an exam, and get away with it. If I could—oh, Miss Ray—would it be possible—would you be willing—*could* you consider letting me go with you?"

Jane looked into the sea-blue eyes which were looking so appealingly into her own. "Yes," she said to herself

again, "I can see exactly how you do it. That look is absolutely irresistible—just angel-sweet and full of sincerity. I wish I could trust you—I really wish I could. But somehow—I can't. Something inside me says that you don't mean it—you don't—you're not genuine. You've some stake you're playing for—you don't care a copper cent about helping over there. How am I going to deal with you?"

It's odd, isn't it? How do we do it—how do we keep up this double discussion, one with our lips, the other with our thoughts? Jane and Fanny went into the matter rather thoroughly, talking with entire friendliness of manner about possible courses to be followed, sources of information to be consulted; and all the time the things they both were thinking ran so far ahead in volume and in direction of the things they were saying that there could be no comparison between the two. Both were much too well trained in worldly wisdom to allow the smallest particle of personal antagonism to show in word or manner, and yet as the talk proceeded each became more and more aware that there was and could be no sympathy or openness between them.

And then Cary came dashing into the shop, and seeing Fanny pounced upon her and bore her away with him for a walk, vowing he should so soon be gone he must make the most of every opportunity. Jane looked after them as they went, wishing heartily that the day would come quickly when Cary would be off and away. His plans were rapidly taking shape; his old newspaper, after a searching interview with him and a series of inquiries directed toward establishing the thoroughness of his reformation, had made him a sort of probational offer which he had accepted with mingled glee and resentment.

"They'll send me, only with all kinds of conditions attached which I'd never accept if I weren't so wild to go. But they'll see—I'll show them. Just let me send back one rattling article from the real front, and they'll be wiring to tie me up to the thing for the duration of the war." Thus he had exultantly prophesied to his sister, and to Robert Black, and to Red, and they had agreed that it was certainly up to him. He had his chance—the chance to retrieve himself completely; they were all three concernedly eager to see him safely off upon his big adventure.

He was so excited about it, so restless, so impatient for the call which had been virtually promised him for an early date, that they felt constrained to watch him carefully. Without knowing exactly why, none of these three friends quite liked to see him often with Fanny Fitch. Jane herself was unwilling to appeal to Fanny, or to give her even a vague idea of his past weakness; she now saw them go away together with an uneasy feeling that she wished it hadn't happened.

An hour later Cary telephoned that he wouldn't be back for dinner; he would take it in town, he said—he had some equipment to look up. He might be back late—Jane was not to sit up for him. He said nothing about Miss Fitch, but Jane's instant conviction was that the two were dining together. Probably they would go to the theatre afterward and come out on a late local. Well, what of it? Fanny was no schoolgirl to need chaperonage; there was nothing in this program to disturb anybody. But Jane was disturbed. Suppose—well, suppose Fanny were the sort of girl who didn't object to having a cocktail—or a glass of champagne—or both—at a hotel dinner alone with a man? What would companionship on that basis do for Cary, just now? She had no reason to suppose that

Miss Fitch was that sort of girl, and yet—somehow—she felt that the chances were in favour of her being precisely that sort of girl. Nan Lockhart's friend—wasn't that voucher enough? Still, friends didn't always know each other as well as they supposed they did. And Fanny, ever since she had dressed the part of the French actress with such fidelity to fact, had seemed to Jane an over-sophisticated young woman who wouldn't much mind what she did, so that she drew men's eyes and thoughts to herself. Excitement—that was what Fanny wanted, Jane was sure. An excellent chance for it, too, dining with a brilliant young war-correspondent, himself keyed to high pitch over his near future. And if the play chanced to be——

A certain recollection leaped into Jane's brain. She went hurriedly to the back of the shop for the city daily, and scanned a column of play offerings. Yes, there it was—she remembered seeing it, and Cary's laughing reference to it at the breakfast table that morning, coupled with the statement that he meant to see it. The play was one of the most noted dramatic successes of the season, its star one famous for her beauty and sorcery, and not less than infamous for the even artistically unjustifiable note she never failed to strike, its lines and scenes the last word in modern daring. A great play for a man and woman to see together, with wine before and after! And Cary could not safely so much as touch his lips to a glass of the most innocent of the stimulants without danger to that appetite of his which was as yet only scotched, not slain. If anything happened *now* to wreck his plans—what confidence in him, what hope of him, could be again revived?

After all, perhaps Jane was borrowing trouble. The pair might have had only the walk they went for, Cary after-

ward taking the train for town alone. On tne impulse—what did it matter whom she offended if she saved her brother from his great temptation?—she went to the telephone and called up the Lockhart residence. Was Miss Fitch in? The answer came back promptly: Miss Fitch was not in. She had not left word when she would be in, but it was likely that she had gone into town, as she had spoken of the possibility.

Jane hung up the receiver with a heavy heart. Perhaps her imagination was running away with her—she hoped it was. But the conviction grew upon her that part, if not all, of her supposition was likely to prove true. Fanny Fitch might be quite above the kind of thing Jane was imputing to her; it might be that Cary himself, aware of the danger to his whole future of one false step now, would be too thoroughly on his guard to take one smallest chance. Hotel lobbies and cafés were always the meeting places of newspaper men; he might easily be recognized by some man who knew that he was upon probation; Cary understood this perfectly; he would take care to run no risk. Would he?

Jane looked up the train schedule. Then she dressed carefully, locked the shop, took the earliest train which would get her to town, and tried to make plans on the way. As to just what she meant to do she was not clear. If no other way presented she felt that she must get hold of Fanny herself and warn her of Cary's susceptibilities and the consequences of any weakening at this hour of his life. And then what? Was there that in Fanny to be counted on?

All the way sne was wishing for Robert Black! Just what he could do she had no idea; that he would somehow find a way she was certain. But it was small use wishing.

The next best thing would be to come upon Red Pepper Burns, and this seemed not impossible, because he was daily to be found in this city of which his own town was the suburb; he did most of his operating at one of its hospitals. What Red might do in the emergency she could hardly imagine, either—but she was equally sure that he would cut across all obstacles to force Cary out of possible danger.

To what hotel would Cary take Fanny? She could be pretty sure of this—it was one at the moment highly popular with the sociably inclined younger element of the city, as well as with the floating class who pick out a certain pronounced type of hostelry wherever they may go. Rather more than moderately high prices, excellent food, superlatively good music, a management astute beyond the average—plus a general air of prosperity and good fellowship—this makes the place for the gathering of the clans who love what they call a good time, and who have in their pockets—for the hour, at least—the money to pay for it.

Jane left her train in haste, crossed the big waiting-room with quick glances to right and left in search of a possible encounter, and at the outer door ran full upon someone she had not been looking for but at sight of whom a light of relief leaped into her face. Mrs. Redfield Pepper Burns stood close beside the door, evidently waiting for someone. Instantly Jane's decision was made. She did not know Mrs. Burns nearly as well as she did the red-headed doctor, but she knew her quite well enough to take counsel with her, sure that she would understand and help.

"Mrs. Burns,"—Jane spoke rapidly and low—"please forgive me for bothering you with my affairs. I may be borrowing trouble, but I am anxious about my brother.

I think he is dining in town to-night at the Napoleon, and may be going to a play. He is with Miss Fitch, I believe, and I'm afraid she doesn't understand that—just now—he mustn't take—any sort of stimulant. Doctor Burns understands—perhaps you do, too—or will, from my telling you this much. I wish—would it be too much?—to ask you to stay and have dinner with me at the Napoleon, and perhaps join Miss Fitch and Cary—or ask them to join us? I can't think just what else to do."

She had always deeply admired Ellen Burns; now, quite suddenly, she found herself loving her. One long look from the beautiful black eyes, one firm pressure from the friendly hand, the sound of the low, warm-toned voice in her ear, and she knew that she had enlisted a true friend.

"My dear—just let me think. I believe we can do even better than that." A minute of silence followed, then Mrs. Burns went on: "My husband and Mr. Black are staying in together, to meet a quite famous man from abroad. They were to have dinner together first at——Wait—I'll not stop to explain—Let me leave a message here, and then we'll take a cab and run back up there. I've only just left them."

In the cab, five minutes later, Mrs. Burns worked out her quickly conceived idea.

"We'll find my husband and Mr. Black, go to dinner at the Napoleon, and ask your brother and Miss Fitch to join us. Once Red knows the situation he will find a way to get Mr. Ray off with them to meet the famous one, and you and I will take Miss Fitch to the play. What is on to-night?" She drew her lovely brows together. "Not—oh, not that very unpleasant Russian thing?—Yes? Oh, we'll find something else—or go to a charming violin recital I had half intended to stay in for. Don't be anxious, Miss

Ray, we'll work it out. And what we can't think of Robert Black will—he's quite wonderfully resourceful."

Hours afterward, when, well towards morning, Jane closed her eyes and tried to sleep, her mind refused to give her anything to look at but a series of pictures, like scenes in a well-staged play. Certain ones stood out, and the earliest of these showed Mrs. Burns crossing a quiet reception room to lay one hand on her husband's arm, while her eyes met frankly first his questioning gaze and then that of Robert Black. Nothing could have been simpler than her reasonable request of them. Might they change their plans a bit, now that she had found Miss Ray, and all go over to the Napoleon to dinner, to find Miss Fitch and Mr. Ray? The hazel eyes of Red Pepper Burns had looked deeply into his wife's at this—he saw plainly that she was definitely planning, with a reason. He was well used to trusting her—he trusted her now. He nodded. "Of course, dear," he said.

Robert Black came to Jane. "I think I understand," he said quietly. "We'll all stand by."

They crossed the street together—Red went to interview the head waiter. Within five minutes the four were being led to a table at the very back of the room, close beside one of those small recesses, holding each a table for two, which are among the Napoleon's most popular assets. And then Mrs. Burns, looking across into the recess, had nodded and smiled, and spoken to her husband, and he had promptly gone across, and invited the pair there to come over and be his guests.

Cary had turned violently red, and had begun to say stiffly and very definitely that his order had gone in, and that it would be as well not to change, thank you, when Robert Black came also into the recess, bowing in

his most dignified manner to Fanny Fitch. Somehow Jane Ray had not known until that moment quite how much dignity he could assume. "Ray," he had said, in the other's ear, "I imagine you haven't heard that Richard Temple is here to-night—on his way back. Couldn't you cut everything else and go with me to hear him? There won't be such a chance again before we get across. I'm sure Miss Fitch would excuse you. It's a smoker, arranged in a hurry. Nobody knew he was coming."

Well, that made all the difference. Call it luck, call it what you will, that the great war-correspondent, the greatest of them all up to that time, a man whom Cary Ray would almost have given his right arm to meet, was passing through the town that night. It had been another man, more famous in a different line, an Englishman from a great university, turned soldier, whom Black and Red had stayed in town to meet. But the moment Black had discovered Jane's anxiety and its cause he had leaped at this solution. The correspondent's coming was an accident owing to a train detention—he had arrived unheralded, and the two men had but just got wind of it. They had been saying, as Mrs. Burns and Jane came to the hotel, that it was hard to have to choose between two such rich events, and that they must look in on the smoker when the Englishman had been heard. But now—Black had all at once but one purpose in the world—to carry off Cary Ray to that smoker, and to stay beside him till he was at home again. That Cary would drink no drop while he, Robert, was beside him, was a thing that could be definitely counted on.

It is possible that no point of view, in relation to the remainder of the evening, could be better worth study than that of Fanny Fitch. Sitting on the foot of Nan Lock-

hart's bed at two o'clock that morning, she gave a dramatic account of what had happened. Nan, sleepy enough at first, and indignant with Fanny for waking her, found herself wide awake in no time.

"The perfectly calm and charming way in which Mrs. Burns simply switched everything to suit Jane shows plainly what an intriguer that girl is—precisely as I told you. Oh, yes—Doctor Burns asked us over, and Robert Black fixed Cary for the war-correspondent affair, and Jane sat there looking as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. Both she and Mrs. Burns seemed merely lovely, innocent creatures intent on distributing good to everybody! But those men never would have thought of taking Cary away from me if they hadn't been put up to it; men never conceive that sort of thing by themselves. That dinner—oh, how I hated it! *Will* you tell me why Cary Ray had to be pried loose from me, as if I were some kind of vampire of the movie variety——"

"But really, Fanny, Richard Temple *is* the one man in the world Cary Ray ought not to miss hearing and meeting just now. It would mean such a lot to him. And if he was only there that one evening——"

"Oh, I'll admit that! But to hear Richard Temple Cary Ray didn't have to be moved over to the Burns table and put in a high chair and have a bib tied round his neck! He was furious himself when the change was proposed; then of course he went delirious at hearing that the Temple man was in town, and forgot his fury. He had to cancel part of his order—worse luck; Mrs. Burns is the sort who wouldn't stand for iced tea if it was served in a champagne glass!"

"Fanny! You don't mean——Why, surely you've been told about Cary Ray. You wouldn't let him——"

"Good gracious, can't the man stand alone by this time? He's going overseas—has he got to have a nurse along? What's having one little glass at a dinner with a girl like me compared with the things men order when they're alone together? He'd better stay home if he isn't——"

"Yes, but—just now, when he's on trial, and he might so easily be held back! And besides, Fanny—you're not—you ought not——"

"Oh, don't preach! Haven't I been a very model of propriety? And am I not going to keep right on being one, as long as there's the least chance of—getting what I want? You needn't grudge me one little jolly evening with a boy like Cary Ray, who comes nearer understanding the sort of fire and flame I'm made of——"

Nan Lockhart lay back upon her pillow. "Fanny," she said despairingly, "the best thing you can do is to go to bed. When you begin to talk about your temperament you make me want to give you a cold plunge and a rub-down, and tie an ice-cap on your head. You've probably been saved from helping Cary Ray make a fool of himself at a time when he can't afford to be a fool, and you'd better be thankful. How you can imagine that a thing like that would help you to find a place in Robert Black's good graces——"

"Oh, it's gentle Jane who's ace-high with him just now, of course!" Fanny pulled the hairpins out of her hair with vicious twitches, letting the whole gleaming fair mass fall upon the white silk of the luxurious little garment in which she had enveloped herself before coming to Nan's room. "He's the sort who was born to rescue the fallen, and serve the anxious and troubled. He acted like a regular knight to Jane—not that he said much to her, but one could see. He was very nice to me—too nice. I'd

much prefer the Jane-brand of his chivalry—sort of an I'll-stand-in-front-of-you-and-take-the-blows effect. And when he went off with Cary and Doctor Burns, and I was left with those two women creatures——"

"My dear, I can't let you keep speaking of Mrs. Burns that way. She's one of the finest, sweetest——"

"She's a peach!" said Fanny, unexpectedly. "I admit I've nothing against Mrs. Burns except that she took me to a dismal violin recital when I'd awfully wanted to see a perfectly ripping play Cary had tickets for."

"Not——"

Fanny nodded. "Of course—why not, Miss Prudy? I didn't mind that so much, though. The thing I minded was Jane Ray's sleekness. She makes me think of one of those silky black cats with yellow eyes——"

But here Nan Lockhart sat up in bed, fire in her own steel-gray eyes. "Fanny Fitch, that's enough!" she said, with low distinctness. "Jane Ray is my friend."

"I thought *I* was! This is so sudden!" And quite unexpectedly, even to herself, Fanny Fitch began to cry, with long, sobbing breaths. Nan slipped out of bed, pulled on a loose gown hanging over its foot, and laid hold of Fanny.

"Come!" she commanded, firmly. "I'm going to put you to bed and give Nature a chance to restore those absurd nerves of yours. You don't want Cary Ray, you can't have Robert Black, and you might just as well give in and take that perfectly good lover of yours who has been faithful to you all these years. He adores you enough to put up with the very worst of you, and he ought to be rewarded with the best of you. You know absolutely that you'd be the most miserable girl in the world married to a man of Mr. Black's type——"

Fanny drew a deep sigh, her head on Nan's long-suffering shoulder.

"It'll not be my fault if I don't have a try at that sort of misery," she moaned. "And I'll do it yet, see if I don't! I know a way!—Oh, yes! I know a way! Wait and see!"

Nan Lockhart saw her finally composed for sleep, her fair head looking like a captivating cameo against her pillow, her white arms meekly crossed upon her breast. Fanny looked up at her friend, her face once more serene.

"Don't I look good enough now for just anybody?" she murmured.

"You look like a young stained-glass angel," Nan replied, grimly. "But—since you were so unjust as to compare Jane Ray to a silky *black* cat I'll tell you that just now you make me think of——"

"I know—a sleepy white one—with a saucer of cream near by. Good-night—saint! I don't deserve you, but—I love you just the same. And I dare you to tell me you don't love me!"

"I'll take no dares of yours to-night. Go to sleep—and please let me, even if you don't." And Nan went away and closed the door.

Back in her own room, when she was once more lying alone in the dark, Nan said to herself, with a sigh deeper than any Fanny Fitch had ever drawn in all her gay young life: "What a queer thing it is to be able to wear one's heart on one's sleeve like that—and not even mind much when the daws peck at it!"

CHAPTER XIII

A GREAT GASH

CONFOUND you—pay some attention to me, will you? Do you *get* what I'm saying? Everything's in train. I've only to take my physical examination—papers came this morning, by the way—and get my passports, and I'm off. For the love of heaven, what's the matter with you, Max Buller? Sitting there looking like a mollusc—like a barnacle glued to a rock—and me having transports all over the place! Don't you know a magnificently happy man when you see one—and can't you——"

Red's manner suddenly changed, as Dr. Maxwell Buller looked up at him with an expression of mingled pain and protest. Red's voice softened, his smiling lips grew sober.

"I beg your pardon, Max, old man," he said. "You're in trouble, and I'm a blind ass—as usual. What's the matter? The Throckmorton case gone wrong, after all? Or worse things befallen? Come—out with it!"

Buller got up. He was Burns' best friend in the profession—the two had stood together since the earliest days of medical school and hospital training. Buller was not a brilliant member of the healing fraternity, but a steady-going, conscientious, doggedly energetic practitioner on whose sturdy friendship through all the thick and thin of the regular grind Burns was accustomed to rely. Never a crisis in the professional affairs of either man but he called

with confidence upon the bed-rock reliability of the other to see him through.

On this particular morning, Red, bursting with the latest developments in the arrangements he was pushing through in order to be able to get away and join Dr. John Leaver at an American hospital in France, had rushed into Buller's office considerably before office hours. He had shouted his plans into the other's ears—so to speak—though technically he had not much raised his voice above its customary low professional pitch. The whole effect of him, none the less, had been that of a boy roaring at a comrade across several fences that he had been given a holiday and was off for glorious sport. And here was his trusty comrade-in-arms glowering gloomily back at him and as good as saying that he grudged him his luck and hoped he'd have the worst possible time of it. That wasn't a bit like Buller—good old Buller, who hadn't a selfish hair on his head, and knew no such thing as professional jealousy where R. P. Burns was concerned. What in the name of time was the matter with him?

"I'd no idea," said Buller, at last, and hesitating strangely, "the thing had gone so far. I knew you thought of going, but——"

"But what? Haven't I been talking going for the last year and a half? And didn't I call you up the other day when I got Jack Leaver's cable and tell you I meant to put it through post-haste? Didn't I——"

"Yes, you've told me all about it. You'll remember that I've said a good deal about the need for you right here, and my hope that you'd delay going a while yet. I think I said——"

"I don't know what *you* said," Red broke in impatiently, interrupting Buller's slower speech in a way to

which the other was well used. "I was much too busy talking myself to notice what any idiot might be saying on lines like those. Good Lord! man, you *knew* I'd go the minute I got the chance. Why, I'm needed over there about sixteen thousand times more than I am here——"

Buller shook his head, his unhappy eyes on the worn rug of his office floor. The shake of that head inflamed Red into wild speech, his fist clenched and brought down on Buller's desk till bottles jumped and papers flew off into space. Then, suddenly, he brought himself up short.

"All right," he growled. "I've blown off. Now—explain yourself, if you can—which I doubt. But I can at least give you the chance."

Buller cleared his throat. He ran his hand through the rapidly graying locks above his anxious brow, sat down at his desk again—as though it might be a little easier to say what he had to say in this customary seat of the judge delivering sentence—and looked unwillingly up at his friend. Red had moved up and closed in on him as he sat down, towering over the desk like a defiant prisoner.

"Get it over," he commanded briefly.

"I'll try to, Red, but—it's hard to know how to begin. . . . You—suppose you let me go over you, will you? —as a sort of preliminary to the examination the Government surgeons will give you."

"What for? Do you think I can't pass? Is *that* what's bothering you?" A relieved laugh came with the words. "Me?" He smote his broad chest with all the confidence in the world—and Buller winced at the gesture. "Why, I'm strong as an ox."

Buller opened a drawer and took out a stethoscope. "Well—you won't mind——" he said, apologetically, and came around the desk as a man might who had to put a

pistol to the head of a beloved dog, and was dreading the sound of the shot.

"All right. But it's about the foolest thing I ever knew you to put up to me." Red pulled off his coat, stripped rapidly to the waist, and presented himself for the inquisition.

Two minutes of absolute silence succeeded during which Buller swallowed twice as if he were trying to get rid of his own palate. Then he stood up with his hand on Red's shoulder.

"I'm—awfully sorry, lad," he said—and looked it, in a fashion the other could not doubt.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you—remember that little trouble you had two years ago?"

"The—infection?"

"Yes. It's left its mark."

"What do you *mean!*"

"You're all right for good solid hard work—here. But —you aren't quite in condition to meet the—requirements of the Service. You—you couldn't get by, Red."

Buller turned away, his chunky, square-fingered hand slightly unsteady as he put away the little tell-tale apparatus which had registered the hardest fact with which he had ever had to confront a patient—and a friend. There was a full minute's silence behind him, while he deliberately kept his back turned, unwilling to witness the first coming to grips with the totally unsuspected revelation. Then:

"Do you mean to say my heart isn't all right?" came in a queer, indignant tone which Buller knew meant only one thing: that Red minded nothing at all about his physical condition except as it was bound to affect the course upon which he had set out.

"Not—exactly."

"Oh, quit treating me like a scared patient. I know you *think* you heard——"

"I did hear it, Red. There's no possible doubt. It's unquestionably the result of the infection of two years ago. We all knew it then. I knew I'd find it now. That's why——"

"I see. That's why you've been advising me not to go. My place was here—*knitting!*"

Buller was silent. His broad, kind face worked a little as the big figure crossed the room to the window. He could look up now—Red's back was toward him.

"Doesn't the amount of work I stand up under, every earthly day and night, show that in spite of your blamed old dissection I could do a good job over there before I cash in—which, of course, may be indefinitely postponed? Nobody knows better than you that a fellow can go on working like a fiend for years with the rottenest sort of heart, and never even suspect himself that there's a thing wrong——"

"I know." Buller's voice was gentle as a woman's. "But—first you've got to pass the stiffest sort of Government tests, Red—and ——"

"*And I can't, eh?*"

It was done—Max Buller's job. He didn't have to answer that last question—which was no question, as he well knew. There was finality in Red's own voice; he had accepted the fact. He knew too well the uselessness of doubting Buller's judgment—the other man was too well qualified professionally for that. Red knew, also, as well as if he had been told in plain language, precisely what his own condition must be. Out of the race he was—that was all there was to it. Still fit to carry heavy burdens,

capable of sustaining the old routine under the old terms, but unfit to take his place among the new runners on the new track, where the prize was to be greater than any he had ever won. And his splendid body, at that very minute, seemingly as perfect as it had ever been; every function, as far as he himself could be aware, in the smoothest running order! He could not even be more than usually conscious of the beat of his own heart, so apparently undisturbed it was by this intolerable news; while his spirit, his unquenched spirit, was giving him the hardest tussle of his life.

Buller was wrong—he *must* be wrong! He was "hearing things" that didn't exist. Red wheeled about, the inconsistent accusation on his lips. It died at sight of his friend. Buller was slouched down in his swivel-chair, his chin on his breast, his head propped on his hand. Quite clearly Buller was taking this thing as hard—vicariously—as Red himself —as Buller usually took things that affected Red adversely. Oh, yes—the old boy knew—he couldn't be fooled on a diagnosis like that. Red turned back to the window. It was all over—there was no possible appeal. . . .

He went away almost immediately, and quite silently. There had been no torrent of speech since the blow actually went home. The red-headed surgeon with Celtic blood in his veins could be quiet enough when there was no use saying anything, as there certainly wasn't now.

Two days later Robert Black, hurrying down the street, traveling bag in hand, passed the office of Redfield Pepper Burns just as the doctor's car drew up at the curb. Black turned, halted, and came up to the car. Red was sitting still in it, waiting for him, the unstopped motor throbbing

quietly. Black hadn't seen him for several days, but the last he knew Red had been deep in his preparation for an early departure. It was on Black's lips to say, "How's everything coming on?"—knowing that no other subject had any interest for Red compared with that. But Red spoke first.

"You've got to know sooner or later," he said, in his gruffest tone, "so you might as well know now. I'm not going over. That's all. Can't stop to talk about it." And he set hand to gear-shift, and with a nod was off again, leaving Black standing looking after him, feeling as if something had hit him between the eyes.

As he walked on, after a moment, his mind was busy with the impressions it had received in that brief encounter. Red's face had been set and stern; it was often that when he was worn with work over more than usually hard cases. His eyes had looked straight at Black with his customary unevasive gaze, but—there had been something strange in that look. He was unhappy—desperately unhappy, there could be no doubt about that. What could have happened so suddenly to put a spoke in the rapidly turning wheels of his plans? Black fell to puzzling over it, himself growing every moment more disturbed. He cared tremendously what happened to Red; he found himself caring more and more with each succeeding thought about it.

He was on his way to the station, to take a train for a distant city, where was to be held a reunion of his seminary class in the old halls of their training. He had been looking forward to it for weeks, in expectation of meeting certain classmates whom he had not seen for six years, and some of whom he might never meet again. He had been exchanging letter after letter with them about it, and

anticipating the event with the ardour with which most men look forward to such reunions at that period in life. There was nothing to do but go, of course; though by now he was longing intensely to follow up Red, by some means, and find out what was the matter. He hadn't liked the look in those hazel eyes, usually so full of spirit and purpose; the more he thought about it the surer he grew that Red was at some crisis in his life, and that he needed something he hadn't got to help him face it. Of course he must be horribly disappointed not to be going across, oh, desperately disappointed! But there was more than that in the situation to make him look like that, Black was sure of it.

His feet continued to move toward the station, his eyes lifting to the clock upon its tower, which warned him that he must lose no time. He had his ticket and a sleeper reservation—it was fifteen hours' journey back to the old ivy-covered halls which had grown dearer in his memory with each succeeding year of his absence. He was thinking that he couldn't disappoint Evans, his best friend, or Desboro, his old college chum who was going to China on the next ship that sailed; such appointments were sacred—the men would never quite forgive him if he threw them over. But this he could do: he could go on for the dinner which was to take place the following evening, and then catch a late train back, cutting the rest of the program, and reaching home again after only forty-eight hours' interval; he had expected to be absent at least five days. No, he couldn't, either. Desboro was on for an address, that second evening, for which he had expressed particular hope that Black would remain. Desboro was a sensitive chap and he was going to China. Well—what——

His train had been called; those determined feet of his took him toward it, though his mind was now slowing them perceptibly. And then, suddenly, his will took charge of the matter—his will, and his love. He loved Red Pepper Burns—he knew it now, if he had not fully known it before; loved him even better than he did Desboro, or Evans, or any of the rest of them for whom he had cared so much in the old days. And Red was in trouble. Could he leave him to go on to hear Desboro's speech, or wring Evans' hand, or even to hear a certain one of his adored old professors say: "I'm especially glad to see you, Black —I want to hear all about you——" a probability he had been happily visualizing as worth the trip, though he should get nothing more out of it.

He turned about face with determination, his decision made. What was a class reunion, with all its pleasures— and its disappointments, too—compared with standing by a friend who needed him? The consciousness that Red was quite as likely to repel as to welcome him—more likely, at that—lent no hesitation to his steps. He went back to the ticket windows, succeeded in getting his money returned, and retraced his steps to the manse even more rapidly than he had come away from it. It was only as he let himself in at the door that he remembered that his little vacation was Mrs. Hodder's as well, and that at his insistence she had left early that morning. He grinned rather ruefully at this thought; so it was to be burned toast and tinned beans again, instead of banquet food! Well, when a fellow was making sacrifices for a friend, let him make them and not permit the thought of a little lost food to make him hesitate. Banquets—and beans—interesting alliteration! And now—to find out about Red without loss of time.

Ten minutes later he was in Red's home, standing, hat in hand, before Mrs. Burns, who had come to him without delay.

"I saw your husband just a minute this morning, and he told me it was all off with his going to France. That's all he said—except that he had no time to talk about it. Of course I understood that he didn't want *me* to talk about it. But something in his looks made me a little anxious. I thought you wouldn't mind my coming to you. If you don't want to tell me anything more, Mrs. Burns, that's all right. But I wanted you to know that if anything has happened to make him—or you—unhappy, I care very much. And I wish I could help."

Ellen Burns looked up into his face, and saw there all that one could wish to see in a friend's face when one is in trouble. She answered as frankly as he had spoken, and he couldn't help seeing that his coming was a relief to her.

"I'm going to tell you, Mr. Black," she said. She remained standing; Black thought it might be because she was too ill at ease in mind to think of sitting down. "I am anxious about Red, too, because he doesn't seem at all himself, since this happened. Two days ago his good friend Doctor Buller told him there was no chance of his passing the physical tests necessary for getting across, on account of trouble with his heart—which he hadn't even suspected. He was very ill with blood poisoning two years ago. The disappointment has been even greater than I could have imagined it would be; he has never set his heart on anything as he has on this chance to be of service in France. Of course I am disappointed, too—I meant to follow him soon, when we could arrange it. And—it goes without saying—that the reason which keeps him is a good deal of a blow to me."

"Yes—of course."

She was speaking very quietly, and with entire control of voice and manner, and the sympathetic understanding in his tone did not undermine her, because there was no weakness in it.

"But—we have accepted it; there's nothing else to do. Doctor Buller says it doesn't mean that Red can't go on working as hard as ever, for a long time—here. But that doesn't help him any, just yet. He has been in—a mood—so dark ever since he knew, that even I can't seem to lighten it. And just before you came I found—this. It—does make me anxious, Mr. Black, because I don't quite know——"

She put her hand into a fold of her dress and brought out a leaf from the daily memorandum pad with a large sized date at the top, which was accustomed to lie on Red's desk. He was in the habit of leaving upon it, each time he went out, a list of calls, or a statement regarding his whereabouts, that his office nurse or his wife might have no difficulty in finding him in case of need. In the present instance the page was well covered with the morning and afternoon lists of his regular rounds, including an early morning operation at the hospital. But the latest entry was of a different character. At the very bottom of the sheet, in the only space left, was scrawled the usual preliminary phrase, followed by a long and heavy dash, so that the effect of the whole was inevitably suggestive of a reckless mood: "Gone to ————"

Black studied this for some seconds before he lifted his eyes. "It may mean nothing at all," he said, as quietly as Mrs. Burns had spoken, "except the reflection of his unhappiness. I can't think it could mean anything else. Just the same"—and now he looked at the lovely face before him, to see in it that he might offer to do anything

at all which could mean help for Red—"I think I'd like to find him for you—and I will. I'm sure I can, even though you don't know where he has gone. Can you guess at all where it might be?"

"He had the car," she said, considering, "and he's very apt, when things have gone wrong, to get off out of doors somewhere—alone—though he's quite as likely to work off his trouble by driving at a furious pace over miles and miles of road. I've known him to jump out of the car and dash off into the woods, in some place I'd never seen before, and come back all out of breath and laughing, and say he'd left it all behind. I think, perhaps, that's what he's doing now. I hope he'll come back laughing this time, though I—I can't help wishing he'd taken me with him."

"I wish he had." Black thought he had never seen a woman take a thing like this with so much sense and courage. How could Red have left her behind, he wondered, just now, when she could do so much for him? Or—couldn't she? Could any woman, no matter how finely understanding, do for him quite what another man could—a man who would know better than any woman just what it must mean to have the foundations suddenly knocked out from under him like that? "But," he went on quickly, "I don't think it will be difficult to find him because—there's a way. And I'm going now, to try it. Don't be worried. I have a strong feeling that your husband is coming out of this a bigger man even than when it hit him—he's that sort of man." He was silent an instant, and then went on: "And he won't do anything God doesn't mean him to do—because he isn't *that* sort of man. He's not afraid of death—but he isn't afraid of life, either. Good-bye—it's going to be all right."

They smiled at each other, heartened, both, by the

thought of action. Black got away at once. It was, by now, well after six o'clock. He had had no dinner, but it didn't occur to him to look out for food before he started on the long walk he meant to take. For, somehow, he was suddenly quite sure he knew where to go. . . .

He had guessed right. Was it a guess? As he had walked at his best speed out of the town and over the highway toward the road upon which Red had taken him that winter night, months ago, he had been saying over and over, "Don't let me be wrong, Lord—you know I've *got* to find him!" He was remembering something Red had said when he first led him up the trail and out upon the rocky little plateau: "This is a place I've never brought anybody to—not even my wife, as it happens—and probably wouldn't be bringing you if we had time to go farther. I come here sometimes—to thrash things out, or get rid of my ugly temper. The place is littered with my chips."

He recalled answering, "All right, Doctor. I won't be looking for the chips." But he had thoroughly appreciated being brought to the spot at all, recognizing it for one of those intimate places in a man's experience which he keeps very much to himself. Where, now, would Red be so likely to go if he had something still to "thrash out," after the two days of storm following the shock of Doctor Buller's revelation?

At the bottom of the hill, well-hidden in a thicket of trees, Black came upon the car—and suddenly slowed his pace. He was close upon Red, then, and about to thrust himself in where he was pretty sure not to be wanted—at first. He meant to make himself wanted, if he knew how. Did he know how? Ah, that was where he must have help. It was going to take more than human wisdom, thus to

try to deal with the sore heart, the baffled spirit, of the man who couldn't have his own way at what doubtless seemed to him the greatest moment of his life. Black stopped short, close to a great oak, and put up his arm against it, and hid his face in his arm, and asked God mightily that in this hour He would use His servant's personality as He would use a tool in His workshop, and show him how to come as close and touch as gently—and withal as healingly—as it might be possible for human personality to do when backed and reinforced by the Divine. A pretty big request? Yes, but the need was big. And Black didn't put it in any such exalted phrasing —remember that. What he said was just this: "Please let me help. I *must* help, for he needs me—and I don't know how. But You do—and You can show me."

Then, after a minute, he went on, springing up the trail, which was plain enough now, even in the fading daylight, to be easily followed. As he reached the top he came in sight of Red through the trees, and stopped short, not so much to regain his breath as because the sight of the man he had come to find made his heart turn over in sympathy, and for that instant he couldn't go on.

Yet Red was in no dramatic attitude of despair. To the casual eye he would have looked as normal as man could look. He sat upon a log—one of two, facing each other, with a pile of blackened sticks and ashes between, reminiscent of past campfires. There had been no fire there recently—no spark lingered to tell the tale of warmth and light and comradeship that may be found in a fire. And what Red was doing was merely whittling a stick. Surely no tragedy was here, or fear of one. . . . The thing that told the tale, though, unmistakably, to Black's sharpened eyes, was this: that the ground was littered

deep, all about Red's feet, with the fresh whittlings of many sticks. "Chips," indeed! Chips out of his very life, Black knew they were; hewed away ruthlessly, with no regard as to what was left behind in the cutting, or what was made thereof.

He could not stand and look on, unobserved, of course. So he came on, striding ahead; and when Red at last looked up it was to see Black advancing confidently, as a friend comes to join a friend. Red stared across the space; his eyes looked dazed, and a little bloodshot.

"I've come," said Black, simply, "because, Red, I thought you needed me. Maybe you don't want me, but I think you need me, and I'm hoping you won't send me away. I don't think I'll go if you do."

Red's odd, almost unseeing gaze returned to the stick in his hand. He cut away two or three more big chunks from it, leaving it an unsightly remnant; then flung it away, to join the other jagged remnants upon the ground.

"Yes," he said, in a hoarse voice quite unlike his own, "I guess maybe I do."

Black's heart leaped. He had not expected a reception like this. To be kicked out—metaphorically—or to be ungraciously permitted to remain—that was the best he could have hoped for. He sat down upon the other log, took off his hat and ran his hand through the locks on his moist brow; he was both warm and tired, but he was not in the least conscious of either fact. All he knew or cared for was that he had found his man—and had his chance at last! And now that he had it—the chance he had so long wanted, to make this man he loved his friend forever—he was not thinking of that part of his wish at all. He had got beyond that; all he wanted now was to

see him through his trouble, though it might make him less his friend than ever.

The two sat in silence for a minute. Then Red spoke. With an odd twist of the mouth he pointed to an axe lying at the foot of a tree not far away. Above it, in the trunk, showed a great fresh gash, the beginning of a skilled woodsman's work upon a tree which he means to fell.

"I began to chop down that tree," he said, in the same queer, hoarse voice. "That's what I've always done—when the pressure got too high. Then—I remembered. If I chopped it down, I might—end things. There's no telling. Buller says my machinery's got past the chopping point—it's time to take to whittling. So—I'm whittling—as you see."

"I see," said Black. He spoke cheerfully—there was no pity in his voice. In his eyes—but Red was not looking at those.

"That's why," went on Red, after a minute, "I'm not going to France. They don't need whittlers over there."

"Do you think you're a whittler?"

"What else?"

"You don't look much like one—to me."

"Don't say that to me!" challenged Red, with a touch of the old fire. "There's no cure for my hurt in the thought that I can keep on working—over here—until the machinery breaks down entirely—which may not be for a good while yet. I want what I want—and I can't have it. What I can have's no good compared with that. It may look good to you—it doesn't to me. That's all there is of it."

"You don't look like a whittler to me," Black repeated, sturdily. "You look like a tree chopper. I can't—and

won't—think of you any other way. . . I wish you'd put up that knife!"

Red stared at him. "Make you nervous?" he questioned.

"It makes *you* nervous. Put it up. Play with the axe, if you like; that's more in character."

The two looked each other in the eye for a minute. The clear gaze of Black met the bloodshot one of Red.

"Here—I'll get it for you," offered Black, and got up and went over and picked up the axe, its blade shining, its edge keen as one of Red's instruments. Black ran his fingers cautiously along it. "I suppose no surgeon ever owned a dull axe," he commented, as he brought it to Red. "This would cut a hair, I think. Take it—and put up the knife to please me, will you?"

"Anything to oblige." Grimly Red accepted the axe, snapped the knife shut and dropped it into his pocket. "Anything else? Going to preach to me now with the axe for a text?"

"I think so. I'm glad you're ready. But the axe won't do for a text—nor even for an illustration. I've got that here." He put his hand to his pocket and drew out a little, worn, leather-bound Book, over which he looked with a keen, fearless gaze at Red. "See here," he said. "I could try a lot of applied psychology leading up to this little Book—and you'd recognize, all the way, that that was what I was doing. What's the use? When you go to see a patient, and know by the look of him and the few things he tells you what's the matter, you don't lead up by degrees to giving him the medicine he needs, do you? Not you! You write your prescription on the spot, and say 'Take this.' And he takes it and gets well."

"Or dies—if I'm out of luck. It isn't the medicine that decides it, either way. It's his own power of resistance. So your simile's no good."

Black nodded. This sounded to him somewhat more like the old Red. "Yours is, then," he said. "It's your power of resistance I'm calling on. You used it just now—when you stopped chopping at that tree. Do you think I don't know—you wanted to keep on, and take the possible consequences—which you almost hoped—or thought you hoped—would be the probable ones?"

And now Red's startled eyes met his. "My God!" he ejaculated, and got to his feet quickly, dropping the axe. He strode away among the trees for a minute, then came slowly back.

"Do you think, Bob Black," he demanded, "you dare tackle a case like mine? I see you know what I'm up against. Do you imagine there's anything in that Book there that—fits my case?" And Black saw that his eyes looked hungrily at the little Book—as men's eyes have looked since it was given shape. When there is nowhere else to go for wisdom, even the most unwonted hands open the Book—and find there what they honestly seek.

"I know there is." Black opened the Book—it fell open easily, as one much used. He looked along its pages, as one familiar with every line. It took but a moment to find the words he sought. In a clear, quiet voice he read the great, brave words of Paul the apostle:

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

A long silence followed the reading of these words. Suddenly it had seemed to Robert Black that nothing he could say could possibly add to the splendid challenge of them to a flagging human spirit. Almost immediately upon reading the last word he had walked away—he had risen to read them, as if such words could be said only by a man upon his feet. He was gone for perhaps ten minutes, and all the while his heart was back there by the ashes of the dead campfire with Red—fighting alone, as a man must fight, no matter how his friend would help him. Somehow Black was sure that he *was* fighting—it was not in Red—it couldn't be—to lay down his arms. Or, if he had in this one black hour laid them down, it would be to take them up again—it *must* be so. All Black's own dogged will, plus his love and his faith in God and in this man, were back there in the woods with Red.

By and by he went back himself. Red was no longer sitting on the log, he was standing by a tree, at the edge of the plateau, looking off through a narrow vista at the blue hills in the distance all but veiled now in the dimness of the coming night. At the sound of Black's footsteps on the snapping twigs he turned.

"Well, lad," he said, in a weary voice which was yet quite his own, "I guess you've won out over my particular personal devil this time. I *have* 'preached to others'—I expect I've got to stand by my own preaching now. It's all right. I'd got too used to having my own way—or

forcing it—that's all. I'll try to take my medicine like a man. I've been taking it—like a coward. Now—we'll say no more about it."

"Not another word. Except—would you mind if I built a little fire, and burned up those chips?"

"I wish you would."

With quick motions Black made a heap of them on the old campfire ashes, touched them off with the match Red silently handed him—he had matches of his own, but he took Red's—and stood looking down into the curling flames. The chips burned as merrily and brilliantly as if they had not been the signs of human despair, and the two men watched till the small fire had burned down to a last orange glow of embers.

Then Black, taking off his hat, said in a way so simple that the listening ears could not want to be stopped from the sound of the words: "Please, Lord, help us to run, '*not uncertainly*,' nor fight, as those that '*beat the air*.' Give us faith and courage for the long way—and bring us to the end of the course, by and by—but not till we have '*run a good race*'—all the way. Amen."

Still silently, after that, the two went down the trail, now in deep shadow. Red went first, to lead the way, and Black noted with joy that he plunged along down the trail with much his old vigour of step. At almost the bottom he suddenly halted and turned:

"See here, Bob Black," he said, accusingly. "I thought you were on your way to the station when I saw you this morning. Weren't you off for those doings at your old Alma Mater you've been counting on?"

"I changed my mind."

"What! After you saw me?"

"Of course."

There was an instant's stunned silence on the red-headed doctor's part, broken by Black's laugh.

"One would think you never gave up a play or a good dinner or almost anything you'd wanted, to go and set a broken leg—or to reduce a dislocated shoulder before breakfast!"

But when Red finally spoke the hoarseness was back in his voice—only it seemed to be a different sort of hoarseness:

"What did you do it for?"

"I think you know. Because I wanted to stand by you."

Red turned again, and began to go on down the trail. But at the bottom he once more stopped short.

"Lad," he said, with some diffidence, "there's a story in that Book of yours—the other part of it—that always interested me, only I didn't think there were many examples of that sort of standing by in present days. I begin to think there may be one or two."

"Which story is that?" Black asked, eagerly—though he concealed the eagerness.

"That—I'll have to leave you to guess!" said the other man—and said not another word all the way home. He sent the car at its swiftest pace along the road, took Black to his own door, held his hand for an instant in a hard grip, said "Good-night!" in his very gruffest tone, and left him.

But Black had guessed. And he had won his friend—for good and all, now—he was sure of that. How could it be otherwise?

CHAPTER XIV

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER

My dear Robert Black:—

Where do you suppose your letter reached me, telling me of your rapidly maturing plans to go to France? At a place not fifty miles away from you, where I have taken a small seaside cottage for the summer! Yes, I did it deliberately, hoping it might mean that I should see you often—for I have missed you more than I quite venture to tell you. And now—I am not to see you after all, for you are to be off at almost any time. My disappointment is as great as my pride in you—and my joy that you are responding to this greatest need of our time. I know you will fully understand this seeming paradox.

Since I have no son to send—and you no mother to send you—and since, as you well know, you have come to seem more like a son to me than I could have thought possible after the loss of my own—won't you spend at least a day with me—right away, lest your summons to join your regiment arrive sooner than you expect? Please wire or telephone me—as soon as you receive this, won't you?—that you are coming. I have my faithful Sarah with me, so you are assured of certain good things to eat for which I recall your fondness. But I am very sure that I do not have to bribe you to do this kind thing for an old woman who cares for you very much. I know that Scotch heart of yours —cool enough on the outside to deceive the very elect, but warm within with a great friendliness for all who need you.

With the belief that a long talk together will do away with the need for a further exchange of letters just now, I am, as always,

Faithfully and affectionately yours,

Marie L'Armand Devoe.

Sitting on the edge of his study desk Black had eagerly read this letter, written in a firm hand full of character, not at all indicative of its being the penmanship of "an old woman." His face had lighted with pleasure, and he had laid the letter down only to turn to consult his schedule of work for the week. This was Monday, the only day he was accustomed to try to keep free for himself—usually with small success, it must be acknowledged. But at least there was no engagement for the evening, and it was the only evening of the week of which that could be said.

During the next half-hour he did some telephoning, held a brief interview with Mrs. Hodder, wrote a short letter, then was off for his train. He had decided to take a local into the city earlier than was necessary to make his connection, in order that he might be safely away before anything happened to detain him. This would give him an hour to spare there before he could get the second train, which would bring him within walking distance of the little seaside village and his friend's new summer home. He would call her up from the city; he had not yet had time to do it. He was glad of the extra hour in which to draw breath and congratulate himself that this Monday was to be a real day of rest. He was obliged to admit to himself that it would taste rather good. What with preaching and parish work doggedly kept up to the customary standard, while he had been at the same time deep in the involved details of securing his chance to go overseas—which now was practically assured—he was feeling just a trifle played out on this warm July morning.

Turning a corner just before he reached the station, he came suddenly upon Jane Ray. Though her answering smile was bright enough, he thought he saw in her face

a reflection of the weariness of which he himself was momently more conscious. The heat for several weeks now had been unusually trying. Jane had been quite as busy as Black himself with the arranging to dispose of her business preparatory to going abroad. She, too, had found —or made—her chance. It looked as if she might get off before any of them—except Cary, who was due to go now at any time.

Black stopped short, in the shade of a great elm.

"I haven't seen you for two weeks," he said. "That ought to be excuse enough for stopping you now? I suppose you know I've been around twice—only to find the shop locked, and the bell apparently out of commission, for it produced nobody."

"I'm sorry," protested Jane. "I found your card both times. If I hadn't been so busy——"

"I know." He looked searchingly down into her face, and it seemed to him it certainly looked a little worn. Perhaps it was the lavender of the crisp linen dress which sent trying reflections into her usually warm-tinted cheeks. Perhaps it was the excessive heat, which incidentally was doing its best to make her smooth hair curl riotously about her ears in a particularly girlish fashion. "Yes, we've both been busy," he agreed. "But that doesn't make two weeks seem any shorter to me. I'm going out of town for the day, but with your permission I'll try that doorbell soon again. All at once, some day, either you or I will get that call, and then—think of all the things we'll wish we had had time to say!"

"Perhaps! Meanwhile, if you're catching the 9:30, Mr. Black, let me warn you that the station clock is two minutes slow. I lost a train by it only yesterday."

Thus she had sent him off, for even as she spoke the

whistle of the approaching local was heard down the line, and Black had only time to take a hasty leave of her and run to the platform, with no chance to buy his ticket.

Standing on the rear platform, as the train went on—the inside of the car had been unbearably hot—he looked back down the long street and caught a glimpse of Jane's lavender linen disappearing in the distance. He strained his eyes to see it, visualizing clearly the face into which he had just been looking. It was a face which had a way of coming before that vision of his many times when he was attempting to occupy himself with necessary work, and of interfering seriously, now and then, with his powers of concentration. There was something about the level lines of Jane's eyebrows, the curve of her cheek, the shape of her mouth, which peculiarly haunted the memory, he had found. It was astonishingly easy, also, to recall the tones of her somewhat unusual voice, a voice with a 'cello-like low resonance in it; easy to recall it and easier yet to wish to hear it again. He found himself suffering from this wish just now, and rather poignantly.

Whose fault was it that he had not seen Jane for two weeks? Since she must have known by his two calls that he wanted to see her, why hadn't she let him know he might come again? The time was getting so horribly short—the call for one or other of them might come so soon. And then what? He was realizing keenly that when the chance of turning a corner and meeting her, of going to her shop and seeing her, of calling her upon the wire and hearing her—was gone, perhaps forever—well—suddenly the thought became insufferable. He must do something about it, and that at once! He must do it to-day. What could it be, since he was on his way out of town?

His thoughts went on rapidly. He made a plan, a daring one—rejected it as too daring—decided that it wasn't half daring enough! What was the use of never doing anything because there might be some possible and remote reason why it wasn't best? This infinite and everlasting caution suddenly irked him—as it had many times before in his experience—irked him till it became unbearable. He would carry out his plan—his end of it. If Jane wouldn't carry out her end—— Well, anyhow he would put it up to her. Thank heaven, he had that hour to spare; it made possible the thing he had in mind.

The minute his train arrived in the city station he made haste to the telephone, and shortly had Jane's shop on the wire, with Sue promising to call her mistress quickly. Then, he was talking fast, and he feared less convincingly than he could have wished, for Jane was objecting:

"Why, Mr. Black—how *can* I? How could I, in any case? And now, with so little time! Besides—are you sure you——And your friend—how can you know she——"

Yes, this usually poised young business woman was certainly being a trifle incoherent. No doubt it was an extraordinary invitation she had received. It was small wonder she was hesitating, as each phase of it presented itself to her mind. Go with him, unbidden by his hostess, to spend the day with him at her seaside home? What a wild idea! But his eager voice broke in on her objections:

"I'm going to call up Mrs. Devoe right now, and I know as well as when I get her answer that she will welcome you as heartily as you could ask. Why, she's Southern, you know, so any friend of mine—— And we'll be back in the early evening. Why shouldn't you go? I can't see a possible reason why not. You wouldn't hesitate, would you—if it were any other——" And here he, too,

became a victim of unfinished sentences, his anxiety to put the plan through increasing, after the fashion of men, with her seeming reluctance to allow him to do it. "Listen, please, Miss Ray. If you'll be making ready, I'll call you again when I've had Mrs. Devoe—if I can get her quickly —and assure you of her personal invitation. If she is in the least reluctant—I'll be honest and tell you so. You've forty minutes to make your train, if you don't lose any time. Please!"

But all he could get was a doubtful: "I can't promise, Mr. Black—I can't decide, all in an instant."

"Then—will you let me call you again, with Mrs. Devoe's invitation, if I get it in time? And will you call a taxi, so that if you decide——"

A low and heart-warming laugh came to him over the wire: "Oh!—I don't know what I'll do. I'm going to hang up the receiver."

"Wait a minute! Will you be on the train? Won't you take a chance? I may not get my friend in time to let you know, but I'll surely have the message by the time you join me. Just remember—won't you?—that—I'm going to France pretty soon——"

"Forgive me!" And the receiver clicked in his ear. It was high time. Two hurried people cannot talk over a telephone and not be using up minutes of which they have none too many.

The next half-hour Black spent in a manner calculated both to warm his body and cool his spirit, if the latter could have been readily cooled. In a smoking-hot telephone booth he struggled with the intricacies of a system temporarily in a snarl—of course it would have happened on this particular morning. He did, at length, get Mrs. Devoe on the wire. He cut short, as courteously as he

could, her rejoicings at the sound of his remembered voice, and put his question. He received the cordial consent he knew he should, though his reason told him she would have preferred to see him alone. He was sorry—he couldn't help that—he would make it up to her as best he could. But have this one day with Jane he must, if it could be brought about.

When he emerged from the booth at last it was much too late to get Jane, if she had left for her train. He might call up the shop and find out what had been her decision, and whether she was on her way, but somehow he preferred not to do that. Rather would he cherish the hope, until her train came in, that she was on it. Ten minutes more, and he would know. Meanwhile—he would try to cool off! Somehow—he had never been more stirred by a possibility—never so looked forward to seeing a train come in. If Jane would come, he felt that he should be almost happier than he could bear and not show it. If she did not come—how was he going to bear that? Suddenly all his fate seemed hanging in the balance. Absurd, when he had not the slightest intention of making a day of fate of it! He couldn't do that; he had decided that long ago. It was only Jane's friendship he had, or could ask to have; that was about the biggest thing he could want before he went away to the war. He was sure she felt that way, as well as he. Without talking about it at all, it had seemed to become understood between them. Why, then, should he be so brought to a tension by these plans for the day? He hardly knew—except that he was becoming momentarily more anxious to have them go through, and to find Jane on that hot and dusty local and bear her away with him for one day to the sea breezes. There could be no possible reason why he

shouldn't do it, with his good friend at the other end to make it seemly.

The train came in. It is probable that could Robert Black have caught a glimpse of the expression on his own face as he watched the stream of passengers getting off, he would have tried to look a shade less tense of eye and mouth! He was hoping, it must be confessed, that if Jane were there, there would be none of his parishioners coming in by that same train. If there were some of them aboard, however, he did not intend to attempt to cover his very obvious purpose of meeting Miss Ray. If there was one clause more emphatic than another in Black's code, it was the one in which he set forth his right to do as his conscience and judgment sanctioned, provided he did so with absolute frankness and openness. But if he would brook no interference with his rights from others, neither would he tolerate intrigue or deceit on his own part.

Nobody whom he knew got off—the long line of passengers had thinned to a final straggler. When he had all but given her up, his heart sinking abominably—she appeared at the door of the car, evidently detained by a stranger asking information. . . . Was it the same weary Jane whom he had seen in the morning? It couldn't be—this adorable young woman in the dark blue summer travelling garb, with the look about her he had always noted of having been just freshly turned out by a most capable personal maid. How did she manage it, she who was accustomed to set her hand to so many practical affairs? And how, especially, had she managed it this morning of all mornings, when in an incredibly short space of time—— Oh, well, it wasn't that Black thought all these things out; he just drank in the vision of her, after his hour

of uncertainty, and rejoiced that she was here—and that she looked like that!

He smiled up at her, and she smiled back; it was like two chums meeting, he thought. He had grasped her hand before she was fairly down the last step of the car. The coming holiday suddenly had become a festival, now that she was here to share it.

"I oughtn't to have come, you know," she said, as they walked down the platform together. "I suppose that's why I did come."

"I don't know any reason why you oughtn't."

"I do—a big one. But I'm going to forget it."

"Please do. I appreciate your coming more than I can tell you."

He looked down at her, walking beside him among the throng of strangers, and experienced a curious and entirely new sense of possession. He was so accustomed to the necessity of steering a strictly neutral course where women were concerned, that to be off like this alone with this amazingly attractive and interesting member of what was to Black practically the forbidden class, was almost an unprecedented experience. He was astonished to find himself quite shaken with joy in the sense of her nearness, and in the knowledge that for this day, at least, he might be sure of many hours with her, never afterward to be forgotten. Surely, that fact of the separation, so near at hand, which might so easily be for good and all, justified him in forcing the issue of this one day's companionship, whatever might be its outcome.

In the second train it was again too hot to think of taking the fifty-minute ride in a stifling coach, and Black again sought the rear platform, found it unoccupied, and took Jane to it. The noise of the train made talking im-

possible, and the pair swayed and clung to the rail in silent company until at length the journey was over. They alighted at a little breeze-swept station, the only passengers for this point, which Mrs. Devoe had told Black was a solitary one.

"Oh-h!" Jane drew a long, refreshed breath. "Isn't this delicious? How grateful I am to you for making me come—now that I am here and feel this first wonder of sea air. It's ages since I've taken the time to get within sight of the sea."

"Do you mean to say I made you come?"

"Of course you did. Imposed your masculine will upon mine, and brought me whither I would not—which sounds scriptural, somehow—where did I get that phrase? All the time I was dressing I was saying to myself that I not only could not but would not. I am in the habit of making my own decisions. I really can't account for it."

"I can. This is to be a day of days in both your experience and mine—it was for us to have, together, before we go across where there can be no such days. Our friendship is a thing that demands a chance to talk both our affairs over in a way we never can back there. Don't you feel that?"

"Yes—I suppose that was why I came. How straightforwardly you put it—like your straightforward self!—Oh, how glorious this is!"

Her head was up, she was walking sturdily erect beside him over a white road hard and smooth with ground clamshells, that ideal road of the sea district. Far away stretched the salt marshes, with a low-lying gray cottage in the distance—the only one along a mile of coast. The breeze, direct from the ocean, made the temperature seem many degrees cooler than that of the inland left behind.

"Isn't it? I haven't known much about the sea since my early boyhood. I was born on the east coast of Scotland, and used to tumble around in the surf half my time, wading or swimming. But that's a pretty distant memory now. I suppose I still could swim—one couldn't forget."

"Oh, no—quite impossible. I was brought up to swim—and ride—but it's years since I've done either. How I'd like to swim clear out into the blue over there! I suppose nothing so wonderful could happen to-day?"

"It might—for you, anyhow. Mrs. Devoe undoubtedly bathes here—she would have something to lend you."

"Oh! I somehow got the impression that she was an old lady."

Black laughed. "She calls herself old. As a matter of fact, she's the youngest person I know. Her hair is perfectly white, but her eyes are unquestionably young—and very beautiful. She is vigorous as a girl, and full of the zest of life, though she insists she is old enough to be my mother. I suppose she must be, for she had a son who would have been my age if he'd lived. She is simply one of those remarkable women who never grow old—and her mind is one of the keenest I ever came up against. She has been a wonderful friend to me, as she was to everybody in my first parish, with her wealth, and her charm, and her generosity, though she was only there part of the time, for she's a great traveller. You'll like her—you can't help it."

"I shall feel as if I were intruding horribly. She must want to have a long talk with you alone—of course she will. You must let me manage it, or I shall be sorry I came."

"I'll let you, certainly—though I've no doubt she would manage it herself. She's too clever to be defeated in get-

ting anything she wants as much as she and I both want that talk. So don't imagine yourself intruding. There are few people who understand better the laws of friendship, human and Divine, and nothing could make her happier than to know that I've found another friend. She's always insisted that there were many people in the world who knew what real friendship meant, but I've doubted it. I still doubt it—in a way—but not as I did before."

Thus the day began for them, with an entirely frank understanding that before it was over they were to know pretty well on what ground they stood. High ground it was to be, no question of that. There was no hint in Black's language or in his manner of intended love-making, but his intense interest both in the subject before them and in Jane herself was very evident. It was quite enough to make the day a vivid one for any such man and woman. There are those who feel that there come hours when the expression of the best and finest friendship may surpass in beauty and in quality the more intimate revelations of a declared love. However that may be, it can hardly be denied that the early approaches of one spirit to another may contain an exquisite and unapproachable surprise and joy, to remain in memory in the whitest light that shines in a world of shadow.

There is no space to tell the whole story of that day. Of the arrival at the cottage—hardly a cottage, it stretched so far its long gray porches in a roomy hospitality—it can only be said that its welcome proved as friendly as the personality of its hostess. Mrs. Devoe put both arms about the shoulders of Robert Black, greeting him as a mother might have done. She gave Jane one smiling

survey of discerning sweetness, said to Black, "She's just what I should expect a friend of yours to be, my dear," and bore Jane off to extend to her every comfort a traveller on a July day might need. Returning, having left Jane for the moment in a cool guest room, she questioned the man as one who must know her ground.

"How much does this mean, and just what do you want of me, Robert?"

"I don't know quite what it means, Mrs. Devoe—except that she and I like very much to be together—and we are both going to France soon. It may be a very long time before we can spend a day together again. It seemed to me we had to have the day. And all I want of you is to let me have part of it with you—and part of it with her—and understand that I'm so glad to be near someone who feels like a mother that I'd have come five times as far for one hour with you."

She nodded. "I know. We have missed each other. But before we begin our talk—it's just the hour for the morning swim. Will you and Miss Ray go in, while I sit on the beach under my big sun umbrella and watch you? I'm not going in now; I had an early morning dip."

"Can you manage it—for me?"

"Of course. I keep several extra suits here, and Sarah has them all in the nicest order for guests."

It was more than he could have imagined hoping for when the subject was first mentioned. What could have been more glorious than to dash down the beach, and find Jane, in the prettiest little blue-and-gray swimming clothes in the world, already floating out on the crest of a great wave? All his early sea training came back to him as he plunged under a lazy comber, and swam eagerly out to join the blue-and-gray figure with the white arms and the

wonderful laugh he had never heard make such music from her lips before.

"If not another thing happens to-day, this will have made it quite perfect," Jane declared, swimming with smooth strokes by his side toward shore, after a half hour of alternate work and play in the blue depths.

"It certainly will. I'm a new man already—feel like a sea-god, in spite of aching muscles. It takes an entirely new set to swim with, doesn't it?"

"Absolutely. What a pity one can't have swimming pools brought to one's door, like fish, when the wish takes one, on a July day. What a dear your Mrs. Devoe is to think of this the very instant we appear. I don't wonder you love her, she's so very attractive to look at, and so young, in spite of her years."

"There's nobody like her—you'll be confident of that when you've known her just one day. What I owe her—I could never tell you—and hardly myself."

Jane was sure of it. She began to understand at once certain qualities she had long since noted in Robert Black. The explanation now was easy: he had been under unconscious training from Mrs. Devoe, his friend. She had been to him, for those five years during which he had served his first parish, not only the mother he had missed but the stimulus he had needed to bring out his best attributes of mind and heart. That she had done this for many another, first and last, lessened not a whit his debt to her. Somehow he had never been more conscious of this debt than he was to-day, upon seeing her again after the interval of more than a year.

After luncheon—a refreshing affair partaken of on the airy end of the seaside porch—Black had his hour with Mrs. Devoe while Jane wandered off down the beach,

taking herself out of sight and sound around a rocky curve. In spite of his eagerness to be with Jane, Black enjoyed that hour to the full, for it meant that he could pour out to this perfect confidante the story of his year amid the new surroundings, and feel as of old her understanding and sympathy, as well as experience afresh her power to show him where he lacked. But it was only for a little that they discussed the affairs of the new parish; both were too full of the bigger challenge to service Black had received, and all that it might mean. *France!* That was the burden of their talk together, and when it ended both were glowing with the stimulus each had received from the other.

"I may go myself," Mrs. Devoe said, looking off longingly across the sparkling blue waters as she rose from her low porch chair, at the end of the hour, ready to send her companion off before he should want to go—one of the little secrets of her charm, perhaps! "Why shouldn't I spend one or two of the last of my active years in work like that? Many women of my age are in service over there—and I can manage things—and people, can't I, Robert?—and get any amount of work out of them without making them cross at me!"

Her beautiful eyes were sparkling as they met his.

"You can do anything," he said with reverence. "If you should choose to do that, it would be the greatest service of a life that has been just one long service."

"Ah, you've always thought too well of me. If I've loved my fellowmen—and women—it's because I've found that there's nothing in life but that—and the love of their Maker. I've been selfish, really, for I never gave without getting back ten—twenty—a hundred fold."

"There's a reason for that," he said with a smile.

She sent him away then, pointing in the direction

Jane had gone. He went almost reluctantly—which was perhaps the greatest tribute to her hold upon him he could have given her. In truth she was the only woman of any age he had ever known intimately, and to go back to Jane, from her, was like leaving home to adventure in the unknown.

But the unknown has its lure for any man—and this particular unknown drew Robert Black with rapid footsteps once he had started in its direction. He had quite a walk before he came upon her, for Jane had gone on and on, following curve after curve of the shore, around one rocky barrier after another. When he caught sight of her at last she was standing upon a great rock, in the shadow of the cliff towering above her, watching a distant ship which was almost hull down upon the horizon.

Young and strong and intensely vital she looked to him as she stood there, her face and figure outlined in profile against the dark cliff. The morning swim and the sea air had brought all its most vivid colouring into her face; the light breeze blew her skirts back from her lithe limbs; she might have been posed for a statue of Liberty, or Victory, or anything symbolic of ardent purpose. And yet he was sure it was no pose, for she did not hold it an instant after his call to her, but came running down the sloping rocks with the sure foot of youth and perfect health, her voice that of warm joy in the hour.

"Oh, I've not been so happy in months—years!" she cried. "I don't know why. It's just sheer delight in being alive, I think, in the midst of all this wonder of sea and sky and air. How can I ever thank you for bringing me down here? It was what I needed to put the breath of life back into me, after all these weeks of work and bother over closing up and getting away. This morning,

when you met me, I almost didn't want to go to France—can you believe that?—after all my preparation! And now—oh! I've just been standing here watching that ship go out, and imagining myself on her, with the ocean breeze blowing in my face as it's been blowing here—only stiffer and stronger as we got farther and farther out. And now—I can hardly wait to go!"

He looked into her face, and met her eyes—and gave her back her radiant smile. And then, suddenly, he didn't feel at all like smiling. Rather, his heart began to sink at thought of the separation so near at hand.

"Come, please," he said, "let's sit down over here in the shade, though you look just now as if you belonged nowhere but in the brightest sunshine. I want to talk it all out. And this is our hour."

He found a seat for her where she could lean against a smooth rock. Then he took his own place, just below her and a little farther back, so that as they both looked out to sea he could study her side face—if she did not turn it too far away. It was rather clever of him, and highly characteristic, if he had known it, of the male mind when making its arrangements for a critical interview. Jane might easily have defeated him in it, but she did not. Perhaps she knew that to talk as freely as he seemed to want to talk he must have a little the advantage of her as to the chance for observation.

"I don't know why it is," he began, slowly, and with astonishing directness, much as he was accustomed to do everything, "but it seems to me that the only way I can possibly make clear to you something you must know, is just simply to state it—and ask your help. I've thought of every other way, and I find I don't know how to use them. I haven't been brought up to feel my way, I have

to cut a straight path. So—I'm going to tell you that—I find it very hard not to ask you to marry me, because I never wanted to do anything as I want to do that. I think it is your right to know that I want to do it—and why I—can't."

There was an instant's silence, while Jane gazed steadily out to sea, her side face, as he looked hard and anxiously at it, that of one who had received no shock of surprise or sorrow. Instead, a shadow of a smile slowly curved the corners of her sweet, characterful mouth.

"Thank you, Robert Black," she said, without turning toward him at all. "Whatever else I have or don't have, in life, I shall always have that to remember—that you wanted me. But of course I know, quite as well as you do, that you are not for me—nor I for you. I have understood that perfectly, all along. You really didn't have to tell me. But—I can't help being glad you did."

And now, indeed, there fell a silence. Where was the "talk" Black had thought he was to have, carefully unfolding to her the reasons—or rather the great reason—why he couldn't ask her for herself, but only for her lasting friendship—for this was what he meant to ask for, in full measure. Was it all said, in those few words? It seemed so—and more than said. There was nothing to explain—she understood, and accepted his decision. That was all there was of it. Was it?

As he sat there, staring out at the incoming waves, each seeming to wash a little higher on the beach than the last, her simple words all at once took on new meaning. Why was she glad he had told her? Why should she say that she *had that to remember?*—as if it were something very precious to remember? No real woman could be so glad as that just to hear a man say he wanted her—even though

he could not have her—unless—— Yes, there was revelation in those words of hers—even quiet, straightforward confession, such as his straightforwardness called for. He had virtually told her that he loved her, though he had carefully refrained from using the phrase which is wont to unlock the doors of restraint. Well, in return, she had virtually told him—yes, hadn't she?—else why should she be glad of his words to remember?

The thought shook him, as he had never dreamed he could be shaken. He had believed he could keep firm hold of himself throughout this interview, in which he was to tell a woman that in asking for nothing but her friendship he was withholding the greater asking only because he must. But now that he knew—or thought he knew—that she cared, too—— Suddenly he drew a great breath of pain and longing, and folded his arms upon his knees which were drawn up before him, and laid his head down upon them.

After a minute Jane spoke: "Don't mind—too much," she said, and the sound of her low voice thrilled him through and through. "It's a great deal just to know that the biggest thing there is has come to one, even though one can't have it to keep. And yet, in a way, one can have it to keep. I have something to take with me to France now—that I couldn't have hoped to have. Perhaps you have something, too. I am trying to give it to you, without actually saying it—just as you have given it to me without actually saying it. I think that's only fair. And I want you to know that I do perfectly understand why you can't say more. You can no more ask me to marry you than—I could marry you, if you did ask me. For I couldn't—Robert Black—even though——"

He lifted his head, his eyes full of a wild will to know

what she would say. "Even though—*what?*" he asked, in a voice which would not be denied.

"Why should I say—what you do not?" she asked, with that strange little smile of hers.

"I thought I mustn't say it. But now that you—— Oh, I'll say it, if you want to hear it."

"I do. You might at least give me that to keep, too."

"Oh!" He turned and looked straight into her uplifted eyes. Then he said the words—that he had thought he wouldn't say. And he heard the answer. After that he didn't know how time passed, because there seemed to be no time any more—just eternity, which was soon to separate them.

Then, all at once: "Jane," he said, heavily, "perhaps some time—when you have been through—what you will go through over there——"

She shook her head. "It would never make me—what I should have to be to fill the place your wife must fill. You couldn't have a hypocrite taking that place—and I couldn't play the part of one. There's a great gulf fixed between us—no doubt of that. I can't accept your beliefs—and you can't accept my—lack of them. It will always be so. As long as I can never say a prayer—and as long as you live by prayer——"

"Do you remember," he asked, "how glad you were to have a prayer said over Sadie Dunstan?"

She nodded. "Because it meant the difference between custom and outrageous ignoring of custom. And I liked the prayer, and respected your belief in it. But—I didn't for a moment think any one but ourselves heard it."

"Sometime," he said again, sturdily, "you will pray, and be glad to pray. And you will know that Someone hears."

"When I do"—her voice softened incredibly—"I will let you know. And—in a way—it isn't true when I say that I don't believe in prayer, because—I could so easily, this very minute—pray to—*you.*"

"To me!" he repeated unsteadily and incredulously. "For what?"

"For what—you think—you mustn't give me. Yet—since we are going so far away from each other—so soon—and—since—the kind of chaplain you will be is just as likely to get—a bullet through his splendid heart as any other man—I almost think—you might give it to me. It is——" He had to bend to catch the words, the heart she had mentioned beating like mad in his breast with what might almost have been a bullet through it, for the shock of it. "It is—so little for you to give—and so much—for me—to have! And I know—with your dreadful Scotch ideas of what mustn't be, you will never, never think you can give it to me unless I—pray for it——"

He was still as a statue, except for his difficult breathing, while she waited, her head down and turned away, a wonderful deep flush overspreading all her cheek and neck. Then, at last, he spoke, in a whisper:

"It isn't '*little for me to give.*' It's—all I have.—I didn't think—didn't dream—I could give it to you unless I gave you—myself with it. But——"

She looked up then. Her lips were smiling a little, and her eyes were full of tears—it was a glorious face she showed him.

"I always knew the Scotch were cautious," she breathed, "and sometimes a trifle—close. But I didn't think they would hesitate so over a 'bit gift'—when—they were withholding—so much——"

She hadn't finished the words before his lips met hers.

And when this had happened, it was she who got swiftly to her feet. He rose also, but more slowly, and with a strange film across his eyes.

"Now," she said, breathing a little quickly, but with the old control coming back long before he could get hold of his, "we're quite all right, I think. We're on a firm basis of friendship for the rest of our days, and everything completely understood. It goes without saying that this was—*something to remember*, and only that. Shall we——"

But Robert Black reached out and caught her hand.

"Jane," he said, "I want you to listen—listen with your heart, not with your reason."

Then, with his head bared, he lifted it, as he had lifted it in the woods with Red. "O my God," he said, "teach her—show her—somehow—Thyself. For she must learn, and I can't teach—this. Over there, if not here—show her that she is all wrong, and that Thou *art* real, and 'nearer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet.' Until then—keep her safe—*for me*."

He opened his eyes. Jane was staring straight out to sea, and on her face was he knew not what of mingled longing, appeal, and protest. Her fine brows were drawn together, her lips were caught between her beautiful white teeth. She turned upon him.

"Robert Black," she said, low and fiercely, "I'll never say I believe God heard that—oh, yes, I know there is a God—but I'll never say I believe He heard, or cared—until I do believe it, not even if it would give me—you."

"And I," answered Robert Black, steadily, "would never ask you to say it till you do believe it—not even if it would give me—you!"

CHAPTER XV

QUICKSILVER IN A TUBE

"WHERE away, Miss Lockhart? May I come along a bit?"

Nan turned, to see Cary Ray's tall figure falling into step beside her, his clean-cut face wearing the look of intent purpose which was now so marked upon it.

"Of course you may. I'm going to the station to meet Fanny. You knew her uncle died, and she went West to the funeral? She's coming back to stay a few more days with me before she goes to join her mother."

"I heard about the uncle. Is it a serious loss for her?"

"I believe he supplied Mrs. Fitch and Fanny with most of their funds, but I think they seldom saw him. He was rather eccentric and a good deal of a recluse."

"Let's hope the funds continue, anyhow," said Cary, lightly, "in the shape of a big bequest. That will alleviate the sense of loss, besides providing a tender memory. These recluse uncles with large bank accounts and generous dispositions are all too uncommon—I never saw the shadow of one. If I only had one now! How I'd leap to make him a farewell visit—in uniform—if I ever get mine. I'm mightily afraid I shan't get it, by the way, till I'm about to sail, so I'll have no chance to strut around this town and call on you all with an air of conscious modesty."

"Too bad," laughed Nan. "But we're quite sufficiently

impressed now just by the knowledge that you'll soon be off. What is the war correspondent's insignia, do you know?"

"Two fountain pens, crossed, on the collar, and a large splotch of ink on the left sleeve," announced Cary, promptly. "Also, in time, presumably, a three-cornered tear over the right knee, and a couple of black eyes, from trying to push to the rear out of danger while rapidly taking notes on what a highly developed imagination assures him is undoubtedly occurring at the front."

"Great! My imagination, though not so highly developed, pictures a quite different scene. . . Oh, isn't that the train coming in?"

"It is. The station clock lies, as usual. We must sprint for it if we want to be on the platform."

They quickened their steps, and were in time to see Frances Fitch appear in the vestibule of her car, and to stare up at her with surprised and—at least in Cary's case—appreciative eyes.

"Oh, Fanny!" It was Nan Lockhart's inner cry to her incomprehensible friend, though her lips made no comment. "How *could* you? Don't you think we must *know* you're acting? You don't care enough for that."

For Fanny was apparently in mourning, certainly in black, the most simple but effective black the eye and hand of skilled dressmaker and milliner could conceive, and in it she was undeniably a picture. Not all the cunning frills and artful colour combinations of her former dressing could approach in the setting forth of her blonde beauty the unrelieved black silks and misty chiffons of this new garb. To Nan's sophisticated eye Fanny's mourning was something of a travesty, for it was all of materials not ordinarily considered available for the trappings of woe;

but it was undoubtedly only the more effective for that. Perhaps, Nan acknowledged, in that first quick glance, it represented the precise shade of honour due a recluse uncle who had been represented in his niece's life principally by monthly cheques and not at all by intimate association.

"My word, but she's a ripping beauty in that black, isn't she?" came from Cary Ray under his breath, as he waved an eager greeting at the girl above him, and received an answering smile slightly touched with pensiveness. "Looks as if she'd been pretty unhappy, too. He was about all she had in the world, anyhow, wasn't he?—except the invalid mother. Poor girl!"

Nan smothered a sigh. Thus was Fanny wont to carry off the interest and sympathy of the spectator, whatever she did, on the stage or off it—if she was ever really off the stage. Miss Lockhart now spoke sternly to her inner self: "Don't be a prig, Nancy! Admit she's perfectly stunning to look at, and she has the right to mourn her uncle if she wants to. She didn't have to make a dowd of herself to do it, just so other women wouldn't be envious."

"Yes, she is a beauty," she answered, in her usual generous way. "And I'm sure it was a great loss."

And then she found herself almost instantly a supernumerary, as she was quite accustomed to be when with her friend in the company of any man on earth. After one ardent embrace, during which Fanny murmured the most affectionate of greetings in her ear—"You old darling—what it *means* to get back to *you!*"—it was Cary to whom the newcomer turned, and toward whom she remained turned—so to speak—throughout the walk home. Nan had to concede to herself, as she kept pace

with the pair beside her, that Cary was doing his part most thoroughly, and that Fanny could not justly be blamed for giving him her attention. Before they had reached the house it began to look to Nan as if Fanny's mourning had gone to Cary's head!

She left them in the library, knowing well what was expected of her, and went upstairs wondering, as she had wondered a thousand times before, just why she cared so much for Fanny Fitch. And then, as a thousand times before, she found the explanation. To do Fanny entire justice, she was not one of the girls who find no time or taste for others of their own sex. Nobody could be more fascinating than she to Nan herself, when quite alone with her. Never down at heel or ragged at elbow in moments of privacy, always making herself charming from sheer love of her own alluring image in the mirror, capable of the most clever and entertaining talk when the mood took her, though there might be no man's eye or ear within reach —it was impossible not indeed quite to adore her. Nan's soberer yet highly intelligent self found a curiously satisfying complement at times in Fanny's lighter but far more versatile personality. It was only when the more irresponsible and reckless side of the other girl's nature came uppermost that Nan found herself critical and sometimes deeply disapproving and resentful.

It was a full hour before Fanny came upstairs. Nan had been waiting for her in the guest's room, where she had had the luggage taken. As Fanny came in, the look of her struck Nan afresh as being past all precedent attractive and appealing. Her colour was now heightened, evidently by the interview with Cary, and her eyes were full of all manner of strange lights. She had not yet removed her hat, and somehow the whole effect of her was

that of one poised but a moment at a resting place on a journey full of both excitement and peril.

The two met in the middle of the large and airy room.

"Well, dear—and aren't you going to take off your hat and settle down?" Nan put up her hand to remove the demurely becoming hat in question. "Why didn't you take it off downstairs and rest your head?"

"I felt better armoured for defense with it. Never mind taking it off—I'm going out again."

"Did you need defense, then?"

"Doesn't one, when a determined young man wants to marry one out of hand? I've only succeeded in putting him off for an hour or two, at that. He says he may go any day, and on seeing me just now he realized he couldn't go without leaving me behind securely tied. What do you think of that, for a poor girl just from a funeral, to be confronted with a wedding?"

"But, Fanny——"

"That's what I said—'But, Cary——' In fact, I never got further than that, though I tried it ten times over."

"But did you—give him any encouragement?"

"Did I? Well, now, knowing me—as you think you do—what's your idea of it?"

Nan studied her, without answering. Her gaze dropped from Fanny's face to her black-clad shoulder, then suddenly she put her arm about that shoulder.

"I'm forgetting," she said, gravely, "that you have lost a friend. I'm sorry. Somehow I didn't expect to see you in black, and can't yet realize that it means bereavement."

"What a subtle way of telling me that my particular kind of black doesn't wholly suggest bereavement! Well, my dear—it seemed to me only decent to show some re-

spect to an old man who has been very decent to me, and left me enough to buy silk stockings and pumps in which to mourn him, to say nothing of other accessories. I don't think he would have approved of henrietta cloth and crêpe—and besides—what I'm wearing suits me better, don't you think? How do you imagine it will impress the Reverend Robert? I've already noted its effect on one young man. Can I hope to make another lose his head within the hour?"

Fanny walked over to the mirror and gave a touch or two to her hair beneath the black hat brim. Nan's eyes still followed her.

"I ought to be used to your breath-taking statements," Nan observed, uneasily, "but I probably never shall be any more than I can become used to the covering up of what I know is your real self with all this pretense of lightness. You are sorry you have lost your uncle, but one would never guess it. And you care—or don't care—for Cary Ray, and I haven't an idea which. As for—the crazy things you've said all along about——"

"Don't hesitate to mention his name—I adore hearing it. And I'm going to pronounce it myself to its owner this very hour—if he's at home. That's why I'm keeping on my hat. And why—" Fanny dived into a small and chastely elegant black leather travelling bag, and after a moment's searching brought forth two filmily fine handkerchiefs which she tucked away in her dress—"why I am providing myself with the wherewithal to weep upon. I have no doubt that what the Reverend Robert says to me will bring forth tears, and I want to be prepared. But whether tears of joy or sorrow——"

"Fanny! You're not—going to him?"

"My beloved Annette, the number of times in the course

of my acquaintance with you that you have pronounced the word *'Fanny!'* in precisely that tone of expostulatory shock couldn't be numbered!—I am going to him—since I don't know any way of making him come to me. Cary happened to say that Mr. Black also was liable to be called at any hour, and I dare not delay. I want to have an important—very important—interview with him while my courage is high. I told you, some time ago, that I should find a way, and I've found it. Wish me good luck!"

That was all there was to it. Although Nan Lockhart was more than anxious as to what might underlie Fanny's mystifying language, she could not doubt, when Fanny presently set forth from the house, that she was going, as she had declared, to the manse. It was by now four in the afternoon. Nan had offered to accompany her friend, saying that she thought, if Fanny must go, that she would best not go alone. She had been told that she was a meddling old granny, and that her place was by the fireside. So—with a kiss—Miss Fitch had walked away, and as Nan anxiously watched her go down the street she had been forced to admit to herself, as she had admitted many times before, that there was an unexplainable and irresistible witchery about Fanny, and that there could be little doubt that somebody was in danger. She wondered which of them it was—if any could be in greater danger than Fanny herself.

The master of the manse was at home when his bell rang presently, so it fell out, though ten minutes before he had not been there, nor would have been ten minutes later. He had rushed in for a certain book he wanted, and was just within his own front door when he heard the bell. He opened it, his thoughts upon the book in his

hand—it was one on "Minor Tactics," by the way, and he wanted it for one of his boys. So he confronted his caller with no means of escape—if he had wanted any. Why mortal man should wish to escape from the vision of sad-eyed beauty which awaited him upon his doorstep none who had seen her there could say—certainly not Cary Ray, who had seen her there, and who was now stalking angrily up and down a side street, intent on keeping her somehow within his reach. He knew that Fanny had meant to come—had she not told him so? Why she had not let him come with her——

"I'm sorry to delay you, Mr. Black, but—I need your help very much. Will you let me come in for a very few minutes?"

"Certainly, Miss Fitch, come in."

What else was there to do? All sorts and classes of people were accustomed to enter the manse doors at all hours, so why not this girl in black with the shadows under her eyes and the note of appeal in her voice, who said she needed his help? What was he there for, except to help? And yet, somehow, Robert Black had never been quite so unwilling to admit a visitor. Something within him seemed to warn him that if ever he had been on his guard, he must be on it now.

If Nan could have seen Fanny, as she took her seat in the chair Black placed for her, she would have wondered if she knew her friend, after all. This the girl with the glitter in her eyes, the reckless note in her voice, the captivating ways which Cary Ray knew so well? This was a girl of another sort altogether; one in deep trouble, who presented to the man before her a face so sadly sweet, lifted to him eyes in which lay such depths of anxiety, that he might well summon his best resources to her aid. If

ever sincerity looked out between lifted lashes, it showed between those heavily shadowing ones which were among Fanny's most conscious and cherished possessions.

So then Fanny told Black her story. It was a touching story, bravely told. Whenever the lines of it began to verge too decidedly upon the pathetic she brought herself up, as she caught her red lips between her teeth, said softly, "Oh, never mind that part—it's no different from thousands of others," and went quietly and clearly on. She told him of the invalid mother, so dear and so helpless —of the uncle who had died, the one man left in the bereaved family, for whom she obviously wore her mourning—"though he would have told me not, wonderful old man, who wanted nobody to grieve for him." She spoke of the future, so obscure, and what it was best to do; and now, suddenly, when she least expected it—she hesitated, then came frankly out with it—here was this suitor besieging her, whom she must answer. And with it all—she was suffering a great longing for something which she had not—a sense that there was a God who cared, which she found it, oh! so difficult to believe. This last was the greatest, much the greatest, need of all. She had come to him because she knew no one else who could point the way. . . .

Here she rested her case, and sat silently looking down at her hands clasped tightly in her lap, her face paling with the stress of her repressed emotion. Yes, it did pale, as well it might. When one dares to play with sacred things, small wonder if the blood seeps away from the capillaries, and the pulse beats fast and small. And Fanny knew—who could know better?—that she was playing, playing a desperate game, with the last cards she held.

It was very perfect acting, and yet, somehow, it did not make the man who watched it lower his guard. He had had no great experience with just this sort of thing, and yet—he had seen Fanny act before, and had detected in her acting that it never once forgot itself in the grip of a genuine emotion. When she ceased speaking, and it became necessary to answer her, he felt his way with every word he spoke.

"Have you told all this to Miss Lockhart?" was the unexpected question he put to her.

Imperceptibly Fanny winced, but she replied quietly: "Nan knows much, but not all. She doesn't quite understand me, I think. I can never make her realize that flippant and frivolous as I can be on the surface, underneath something runs deep."

"Yet she must want to assure herself of that, she's so finely genuine herself. Ever since I have known her I have thought her one of the best-balanced young women I ever knew. She seems very devoted to you. And as for her faith in things unseen, I am sure it is very real. I don't see how you could do better than to put yourself under her tuition."

"I have tried, Mr. Black—I assure you I have. Nan and I are dear friends, and I respect and admire her devotedly. But I can't talk about these things even to her. Somehow I can't to any woman. I need—I think I need a man's point of view. And not only a man's but—a priest's."

Her eyes lifted themselves slowly to his, and there was a spiritual sort of beseeching in them which very nearly veiled and covered the terribly human wish which was behind. For a moment Black wondered with a heart-sinking throb of anxiety if he were right in distrusting her

motive in coming to him as he had thus far distrusted it. How should he dare not to respond to her need, if it were real? How send her from him unanswered and unsatisfied, if he could really do anything for her? Why, merely because she was fascinating to look upon, must she be a deceiver; while if she sat before him with a plain face and red, white-lashed eyes, he would be far surer that she was in real distress. It wasn't fair to her, was it, to doubt her without the proof?

While he hesitated over what to say to this appeal, all at once he was confronted with a new situation: one ever calculated to weaken and undermine the judgment of man. Fanny sat close beside his study desk, from the opposite side of which he faced her. When his silence had lasted for a full minute she quietly turned and laid her arm upon the desk—a roundly white arm, the fair flesh showing through the sheer black fabric of her close sleeve—and buried her face in her arm. With her free hand she found her handkerchief—one of the two with which she had provided herself—and then Black saw that she was softly sobbing, and seemingly trying with much difficulty to control herself.

Well—was this acting, too? Can a woman weep at will? And if she were as unhappy as she seemed, what was he to do about it? It was an extremely uncomfortable and disquieting situation, and Black wondered for a moment if he could possibly see it through without blundering. He was wishing ardently that he had a mother or a sister at hand. There was only Mrs. Hodder whom he could call in, and she was assuredly not the person to act as duenna to this young woman. To bring her in would be to send Fanny out. And was it possible that this was really his opportunity, and that

he must forget everything except to use it for all that there was in it?

"I'm sorry you are unhappy," he said. "Of course it's not possible for me to advise you as to Cary Ray—only yourself can answer that question. I've grown to like and respect him very thoroughly, and if you could be to him what he needs in the way of a sheet anchor, it would help him more than anything in the world to steer a straight course."

Fanny lifted a tear-wet face. "Would you advise me to marry him—without—loving him?"

"Certainly not."

"If I cared with all my heart and soul for—someone else——" She rose suddenly to her feet, and stood before him, a tragic, lovely figure of despair. "Oh," she breathed, "you simply have to know—I can't keep it from you. You are going so soon—there's no time to wait. I—I don't know what you will think, but—over there you are going to go into all sorts of danger. I may never see you again. Is it a time to be afraid—for even a woman to be afraid—to speak? You may despise me for—showing my heart—but—oh, I can't help it! Don't—turn me away. If you do, I think I shall—die!"

Robert Black stood as if turned to stone. He had risen as she had risen; he now stood staring at her across the massive old black walnut desk as if he could not believe the evidence of his own ears. If Fanny were to make this incredible declaration at all, she had done it in the only possible way—across that study desk. If she had attempted to come near him, to put her hand in his, to try upon him the least of all feminine arts in approaching man, he would have retreated, bodily and spiritually, and have been at once too far away for her to reach. But

the very manner of her appeal to him carried with it a certain dignity. He could not conceivably repulse her in the same way that he could have done if she had played the temptress, or even the woman who counts upon her personal charm at close range to sway a man's heart and influence his decision. Fanny had studied this man, and gauged him well. If she had any possible chance with him it was only by making her supplication to him from a distance, and by looking, when she had made it—as she did look—like a young princess who stoops to lift him of her choice to her estate. It was undoubtedly the greatest moment of Fanny's dramatic experience; she was a real actress now, for beyond all question she was living the part she acted, and the emotion which stirred her was the strongest of her life.

It was not long that Black stared at her white face, his own face paling. It was only for a moment that she let him see all she could show him; then she turned and walked away, across the room, and stood with her back to him, her hands clasped before her, her head drooping. The figure she thus presented to him was still that of the princess, but it was also that of the woman who, having for the instant lifted the veil, drops it again, and awaits in proud patience the man's pronouncement.

Black came slowly toward her—it did not seem possible courteously to address her across the many feet of space she had now put between them. He stopped when he was near enough—and not too near—he seemed to know rather definitely when this point had been reached. But before he could speak Fanny herself broke the stillness. She put out one hand without turning.

"Please don't come nearer," she breathed. "I can't —bear it."

And then she did turn, lifting to him a face so beseeching, lifting to him for one instant's gesture arms so imploring, that if there had been in him one impulse towards her he would have been more than man if he had resisted her. But—how could there be in him one impulse towards her when, with every moment in her presence, there had been living more vividly in his remembrance that other moment, now days ago, when he had given Jane Ray—"all he had." Though never again—never again—should even so brief a glory of experience come to him, rather would he have that one wonderful memory than all that there might be for him in these two outstretched arms.

Yet—how could he but be pitiful—and merciful—to Fanny Fitch? To have offered herself to him, and to have to stand there waiting to be taken or refused—there seemed to him no words too kind in which to make her understand. And yet—how to find words at all!

"You must know," he said at last, and with difficulty, "that I am—that I have—no way to tell you—how badly I feel to have you tell me this, and to be—unable to——"

"You're not unable—you're just afraid. You've kept your heart sealed up so long—you've been so frightfully discreet—such a model minister—you don't know at all what you're putting away from you. It will never come back—you'll never have the chance again I'm giving you—to live—to *live*—oh, to live with all there is of you, not just with the nice, proper, priestly side of you!" The passionate voice lifted and dropped again in choking cadences. "You think I couldn't adapt myself, couldn't fill the part. I could—I could!—I would do anything you asked of me—become a mystic, like youself—or——"

"Oh, *stop!*"

Fanny stopped—there was no disobeying that low, commanding voice. She knew herself that she had now gone too far. She stood with both hands pressed over her throat, which threatened to contract and shut off her breathing.

"I can't let you—I won't let you go on. You're overwrought—you're not yourself, Miss Fitch. Your long journey—your uncle's death—Cary's suit—everything has combined to overtax your nerves. You're going to put away this hour as if it had never been, and so am I. You're going to find happiness in being a good friend to Cary, whether or not anything comes of it. He's worth all you can give him—and you're going to give him your very best. Now—won't you——"

"Go away?" She looked up at him with a twisted, angry smile. "Before you have—prayed with me, for the good of my wicked soul? You might at least do that, since it's all you can do for me!"

Suddenly he felt as if he were in the midst of cheap melodrama, forced to take a part against his will. He had never believed in this girl, he believed in her less than ever now. For a moment she had convinced him that in her own fashion she loved him—if she knew what the word meant. But now he was driven to believe that only her passion for excitement had brought this scene upon him, and that this last cynical speech was just the expression of her fondness for the drama. He turned cold in an instant; his very spirit retreated from her.

"I should feel," he said, very quietly, "as if I were playing with prayer, if I made use of it just now. I think the best thing for you is to try to rest and sleep, and come back to a natural and sane way of looking at things. If doors don't open at a touch, if they are locked and one

has no key, it's not wise to try to force them. There are plenty of doors that will open at your touch——"

"But not yours! And now that you have locked and doubled barred it I want to tell you that it's too late. I've seen inside, and know what a chilly, stony place it is. There's no fire there—it's all austerity. No woman could keep warm there, certainly not a woman like me. I've long wanted to know what was behind that granite face of yours, and now I've found out. I've kept my splendid, big-hearted Cary waiting till I could satisfy myself about you, and know that he was worth two, three—ten of you, Robert Black! I'm going back to him—and happy to go. Do you wish me joy? Or does even doing that go against your flinty conscience?"

He came toward her, pitying her again now, it was so obvious that she was trying to save her humiliated face.

"Miss Fitch," he said, gently, "I do wish you joy—if you can find it in anything genuine. But don't play with Cary Ray—he doesn't deserve it."

"Will you marry us to-night at eight o'clock?"

He looked at her steadily. "You don't mean that!"

"I certainly do. That was what I came for—as he knows. And to settle a little wager I had with him. I've settled it. And now I'm doing my real errand. Will you marry us, Mr. Robert Black?—since you have refused—everything else?"

He walked away from her now, over to the window, and stood looking out for a space. Fanny watched him, her head up, her lips smiling a little, ready to face him when he turned again. He came back at last, and he spoke quietly and decidedly.

"If you will send Cary to me," he said, "and he asks me to do this, I will do it. Not otherwise."

"What do you want to do? Talk with him, and try to persuade him that I'm not good enough for him?"

"I want to talk with him. I want to ask him to wait to marry you till he comes back."

"And why, if you please?"

"Because he's going to find out, over there, that life is something besides a game. And when he comes back, if he still wants you, it will be because you have found it out, too. Oh, I wish—I wish with all my heart—you would stop playing and be real. Why not?"

"I think," said Fanny Fitch, "it's because I'm made that way. You might as well give me up. If I laugh, it's as likely as not to be because I want to cry. And if I cry, it's more than likely to be true that I'm laughing inside. I love to act, on the stage or off of it. How can I help that? It's the true dramatic instinct. How can I be any more real than I am? Being what you call unreal is reality to me. If I were to try to be what to you is real, I should be more unreal than I am now. There, Mr. Minister what will you do with that?"

Black shook his head. "You are merely juggling with words now," he said. "I think you know what I mean as well as I do. And I think something will happen which will make you unwilling to play with things—and people—as you do now. Meanwhile——"

The doorbell rang sharply. It was what Black had been expecting all along. There was nothing to do but answer it. Mrs. Hodder was accustomed to do this only by request, and he had not asked her for it to-day, for she was more than usually busy in her kitchen. Black went to the door, leaving Fanny behind, and hoping against hope that it might not be some caller who would be certain to misunderstand the whole situation. It

proved to be the one man whom he could have wished to see. Cary Ray had walked the street to a purpose, though he had not known, for he had met a messenger. With his message in his hand he had rushed to the manse door.

"Is Fanny here?"

"Yes. Come into my study, please."

Breathless with his fast walk which had been all but a run, Cary confronted Fanny across the room. He crossed it, seized her hands, and stood looking down into her face with excited eyes. The drops stood out upon his forehead.

"You put me off too long," he said. "I'm off—no time for anything but to throw my things together and catch the next train. I knew when the orders came they'd come this way. There isn't even time for—what we'd have to get first if we did what I wanted. Perhaps—since you didn't know your own mind—it's just as well. Maybe—if I come back—you'll know it better. And if I don't—never mind. All I want is to get into the game somehow."

Even at the moment Fanny looked past Cary at Robert Black.

"You see," she said, "he calls it a game, too."

"He won't," Black answered, "when he comes back—as please God he will."

"I can't stop a minute. Will you both go with me, over to my sister's?"

"Of course."

Black caught up his hat. Fanny snatched a glance at herself as she went by a sombre black-walnut-framed mirror in the hall. Cary mopped his brow and ran a finger round inside his collar. It was quite plain that his eagerness now was concentrated on the great news of his imminent departure. Suddenly nothing much mattered

to him except that at last he was off, with his longed-for chance before him. That was the big thing to him now, not getting married in haste and leaving a bride behind him. It was as plain as could be in every word he said, and in the joyful sparkle in his eyes. Quicksilver in a tube was Cary Ray—and the mercury had jumped all but to the top!

The following hour was as wild a one as only those can conceive who have had an experience like it. At the end of it Cary and Jane, Fanny, Nan Lockhart, and Robert Black stood on the station platform with six minutes to spare. At almost the same instant Doctor Burns's car drew up, and he and Mrs. Burns joined the group.

"You are all regular bricks, you know," declared Cary, "to stand by me like this. Everybody's here I could have wanted, except Tom, and since he beat me to a uniform, and there's no way of getting his training camp on the wire in a hurry, I'll have to go off unsped by him. But I know what he'd say: 'This is the life!' He's said it to me at least once a week on a postcard, ever since he left us."

"If you are half as happy to be in it as he is——" began Nan.

"I'm twice as happy—no question of it. And I want to tell all you people——" Cary paused, looked quickly from one to another, and his bright glance fell. "No, I don't believe I can," he confessed, "at least not in a group like this. I think what little I can say I owe my sister. If you'll forgive me I'll take her down the platform a bit and give her my parting instructions."

He grasped her arm and walked away with her, the friendly eyes following the pair. Friendly? Black couldn't help wondering just what Fanny was thinking as she

looked after them. Certainly she was paler than he had ever seen her—or was that her unaccustomed sombre attire?

"Sis," Cary said in Jane's ear, "it's tough to go like this, after all, with all the things I want to say left up in the air. I hope you'll somehow make those trumps back there know what their friendship has meant to me.—I say—" he broke off to stare at her—"by George! I didn't know you were so easy to look at, little girl. You—you—why you're the sweetest thing that ever happened—and not just soft sweet, either—stingingly sweet, I should put it."

"Dear, you're just seeing me through the eyes of parting. Cary, when I get across we can surely meet sometimes, can't we? Correspondents have more freedom of movement than other men, I'm sure."

"We'll try it, anyhow. Janie—I want you to know how I just plain worship you for sticking by and pulling me out of the ditch the way you have—you and Bob Black, and the Doctor. Words can't say it—but maybe actions can. I'm taking you three with me—and leaving behind a girl who doesn't know whether she wants me or not. Best thing to do—eh?"

Well, he was excited, strung to a high tension, eager to be off—it could be read in his every word and look. He had barely said these things to Jane before he had her back with the others, and was getting off gay, daring speeches to one and another, sometimes aloud, sometimes under his breath for one ear only. The words he left with Fanny Fitch stayed with her for many a day.

"Get into the game, somehow—will you? You can do that much for me, anyhow. If you will I'll call it square—of you."

When he had gone, his handsome, eager face laughing back at them from the rear platform of his train, Robert Black found himself following Cary with an involuntary "God bless and keep you safe, Cary Ray!" the more fervent that it was unuttered. Suddenly his heart was very anxious for this audacious and lovable fellow. How would he come through? Yet it was not of Cary's life that he was thinking.

Determinedly he took his place beside Jane. The party had dismissed their taxicab, now that the rush for the train was over, and were walking back. It was no time to allow circumstances or other people to come between them.

"Oh, how I wish," breathed Jane, "that I could go this very night. I want so much to get away before—you do."

"And I'm wanting to go before you! If you go first I shall see you off. If I go first, will you do the same for me?"

"Your whole church will be there."

"Not if I can help it. But even if they are, it will make no difference. I shall want to look last at—you."

"Did you think," admitted Jane, smiling, "that I could possibly stay away?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE ALTAR OF HIS PURPOSE

I THINK maybe—it's come, Mr. Black."

Mrs. Hodder, housekeeper to the manse, stood trembling in the study doorway, a telegram in her hand. Yes, Mrs. Hodder was trembling. Robert Black would never know how like a mother she felt toward him. A lonely, more than middle-aged woman can't bake and brew and sew on buttons and generally look after a bachelor of any sort without coming to have a strong interest in him—normally a maternal one. And when the bachelor is one who treats her with the consideration and friendliness this man had always shown Henrietta Hodder, small wonder if she comes to have a proprietary interest in him little short of that belonging to actual kinship.

Black jumped up from his desk. It was Saturday night, and his sermon was still in preparation. This was unusual with him, but everything that could happen had happened, this week, to consume his time and delay him. Everybody, it seemed to him, in his parish, had needed his services for some crisis or other. He was tired of body and jaded of spirit, and he was extremely discontent with the outlines for the sermon which he had with difficulty dragged out of his unwilling mind. And now, in the twinkling of an eye, everything was changed.

He read the message in one hurried instant. Yes, it was here, couched in military language with military

brevity. He was to proceed at once—nobody in the Service is ever ordered to go anywhere, always to proceed—and to report within forty-eight hours to his commanding officer at a camp at a long distance. This meant—yes, of course it meant—that he must leave town by the following evening, Sunday evening. And it meant also, equally of course, that between this hour and that he must be practically every minute on the jump. Well, he couldn't but be glad of that.

His weariness vanished like magic. Mrs. Hodder, watching him read the message, knew by the way he stiffened and straightened those shoulders of his, which had been humped over his desk when she came to the door, that the expected call had come. He looked at her over the yellow sheet.

"Yes—this is it!" he said. "I must be off—to-morrow night."

She swallowed a great lump in her throat. "I expect—there'll be a many things to do," she said. "I've got your clo'es in order—I've been keeping them mended up, ready—your socks and all."

Black smiled. It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her that not an article of his ordinary apparel would go with him to France, but he hadn't the heart just then. It struck him that Mrs. Hodder was looking a little odd to-night—strangely pale for one whose countenance was usually rather florid. Then—he saw her hand shake as she put it up to smooth back her already smooth gray hair, an act invariable with her when disturbed in mind. It came over him that his housekeeper was not just happy over his wonderful news. And suddenly, he almost understood why. Not quite. How could he know what ravages he had committed upon that staid, elderly heart?—he who

had borne himself with such discretion under this roof that he had never so much as touched the woman's hand except to shake it.

His own heart suffered, at this instant, its first pang at the thought of leaving this comfortable home of his and the ministrations of this plain person who had—yes, she had done her best to mother him—he knew it now—as far as a woman could who was shut away by all sorts of invisible barriers from any real approach. He put out his hand and took her trembling one and held it in both his own. He was a chaplain now, he was leaving his parish, he could do as his will dictated!

"I want you to know," he said, "that I appreciate, as well as a man can, every thought you have taken for me. You've made this house seem as much like a real home as you could possibly have done. I shall remember it always."

Pale? Had she been pale? She had flushed, in an odd, mottled sort of way, to her very ears—and the back of her neck. Her breath seemed to come a little short as she answered him.

"But—you'll be coming back, Mr. Black?" she questioned, anxiously. "You're only going for—a while? I'll—you'll—I wanted to speak for the place again, if I might, when—you come back, sir."

Black's softening face hardened suddenly. "No, I don't expect to come back to this parish, Mrs. Hodder," he said. "I'm resigning to-morrow."

"*What's that?*"

A deep voice boomed from the hall outside, and Black and Mrs. Hodder turned together. Red appeared in the doorway of the study, having met the telegraph messenger coming away just outside the house. He was, by now,

the sort of friend who follows up a telegraph messenger on the chance that he may be needed.

Mrs. Hodder knew her place, if momentarily her master himself had caused her to forget it. She withdrew her hand from Black's and left the room hurriedly; and the tears which flowed the moment she was out of sight were not wholly unhappy ones. As for her hand—the hand he had held so warmly in both his—well, it was a very precious hand to her now. Like Jane Ray, she had "something to remember!"

"What's that you say?" demanded Red, coming in like a gathering tornado. "I know you've got your orders, or you wouldn't be found holding your housekeeper's hand. But—what in thunder do you mean by saying you're resigning your church?"

Black sat down on the edge of his desk—he was rather glad to sit down on something if an argument with R. P. Burns in his present mood was to take place. Not that there could be any argument, but he knew the signs of warfare when he saw them.

"Why, there's nothing else to do," he replied, quietly.

"Nothing else to do! Do you mean to say they're not giving you a leave of absence?"

Black shook his head. "I've not asked for any."

"But they know you're going?"

"Know I'm likely to go. It was only fair to tell them that to give them a chance to look around for a successor. I've been perfectly frank with Mr. Lockhart about it. He's been skeptical all along as to my getting the call for a good while yet, but I've warned him over and over that it might come—just as it has come. So—I'm resigning in the morning, and getting off at night. Good way to go—isn't it?"

"Good way for you—and a blamed poor way for some of the rest of us. See here! Oh, hang that church—what's the matter with it? Why, my wife didn't know this. She supposes, of course, you're going on leave. She thinks, as I did, that the parish has got a string on you that amounts to a rope, to haul you back with. Do you mean to say—— Why, confound Sam Lockhart! I thought he was one of your best friends."

"He is."

"I know," admitted Red, "you haven't been particularly easy to get along with. You preached war when they wanted you to breathe peace, ever since you came. You've insisted on picturing the flowing blood over there when it made some of 'em feel ill just to hear about it. You've had your way about a lot of things, Bob, that they were accustomed to manage their way. I suspect you've been a thorn in some folks' flesh—bless your dogged spirit! But—my faith!"—and his eyes shot fire—"to let you cut loose and go to war, without—— Why, they ought to be proud to *send* you. They ought to take you to the station with a brass band. They ought——"

"Oh, see here!" Black slid off the desk-edge, came over to his friend, and caught him by both shoulders. "You can't make people over by roaring at them in my study. And much as I want to see you, and warm as you make the cockles of my heart by your roars, I've got to put you out and get down to work. Why, man, do you realize this changes all my plans for to-morrow in an instant? I can't preach the thing I meant to preach—not now. I've had just one text in mind for my last Sunday here, whenever it should be, and I've got to preach on that if I stay up all night to think it out. And since it's already——"

Red pulled out his watch. "Yes, it's ten o'clock this minute. All right—I'll get out. But first—lad——"

He paused. The flow of his words, which had been well started for a torrent, halted, ceased. He cleared his throat. He took his lower lip between his teeth and bit it savagely, then released it, waited a minute longer, and spoke. But—could this be Red speaking?

"Bob," he said, "before you go—will you take me into your church?"

There was a moment's silence, because Black's heart simply stopped—turned over—and then went on again; and an interval of experience like that always makes speech impossible. And when he did speak all he could say was:

"Oh, Red!"

"All right. Now, I'll go."

Black's hand seized his. The two hands gripped till they practically stopped the circulation in both.

"I'll get consent to have a special communion service in the morning—I should have wanted it anyway. You know, of course, you'll have to come before——"

Red nodded. "I don't like that part. You're the only man I want to come before—but I'll go through the usual procedure. I may not measure up to——"

"Oh, yes, you will. You've always measured up, only you wouldn't admit it. Don't mind about that—just answer the questions in your own way. See here, Red——"

But he couldn't say it, and Red knew that he couldn't—and didn't want him to. Didn't Red know without being told that if there was one thing that could take the soreness out of Black's heart over having his church let him go like this, it would be his receiving this other great desire of his heart? How did Red know that Black wanted him

in his church? Why, they had become friends! There need be no other explanation.

So then Red went away. Where he went doesn't matter, just now, though wherever it was he went straight as an arrow to it—rather, he went straight as one of those famous seventy-five millimetre shells of the Great War went to its objective. And when he hit the spot something blew up and things were never the same again in that particular place, quite as he had intended they shouldn't be. For a new member of the Stone Church—which he wasn't—yet—his activities seemed to begin rather early.

Black sat down to his new sermon. No, he walked the floor with it. He had said there was just one text he wanted for that sermon, and given that text, plus the tremendous stimulus of the complete change in the situation, he could hardly stand up under the rush of his thoughts about it. Instead of ploughing heavily, as he had been doing, his mind was now working with lightning rapidity. There was no time to write the new sermon out, he could only frame its outlines and stop at his desk, every now and then, to make notes of the filling in. By midnight it was complete—the last sermon he was to preach in this church; it might easily be the last he would ever preach in any church. That didn't matter; all that mattered was that he should get his white-hot belief upon the cold anvil of his audience's intelligence and there hammer it into shape till the anvil was as hot as metal, and something had taken form that had never had form before.

It was two o'clock when he finally went to bed. It was four o'clock when he went to sleep, six when he awoke. When his eyes opened he had a new thing on his mind—and it was an old thing—a thing he had long meant to do

and had never done. Strange that it should rise up to bother him now when the day was already so full! He tried to put it aside. He was sorry, but it was too late, now. A pity that he hadn't seen to it long ago, but it was certainly too late now.

Was it too late? And why was the thought of it knocking so persistently at the door of his plans for the day if it were not that it was for him to do, after all? Somehow he couldn't put it aside—the remembrance of that forlorn and neglected community, up on the hills, so near and yet so far, where he had buried Sadie Dunstan, and to which he had always meant to return—some day. And that day had never come. Well, he had been incessantly busy—he could have done no more. Demands upon his time and strength had called him in every direction but—that. Yet probably he had been no more needed anywhere than there. Too bad, but it was most certainly too late now.

At seven his telephone rang. It was Red's voice which hailed him:

"I just want to put myself at your disposal for the day as far as I can cut my work to do it. Jim Macauley says if you want his seven-passenger for any purpose whatever consider him yours to command. He thought you might want to pay some farewell visits or something, and would like to take a few people along. Plenty of candidates for the job—you'll have to pick and choose. What time do I—face the music?"

"Just before church, Red—ten o'clock in the vestry room. I've called them all—they don't know whom it is they're to meet. About the car—thank you and Macauley. I want very much to go up on the hills, where Sue Dunstan came from, and hold a little open air-service this afternoon.

I m going to ask two of my boys to run up there and get as many people notified as possible."

"Great Cæsar! That the way you're going to spend your last hours? Why, Ellen is planning to open our house for all your friends and——"

"Thank her heartily for me, will you? And tell her that if she and you will go along with me up there I'll like it much better than anything else she can do for me. I want to take Miss Ray, too, if I may."

"Anything you say goes, of course. I told my wife I doubted if you'd stand for the reception idea, and I don't blame you for not wanting it, but—I didn't expect you'd want to do a stunt like that. All right—I'll stand by. Sure you don't want to preach to the crowd that'll be at the station? Wonderful opportunity—better not miss it!"

"See you at ten o'clock, Red. Stop joking about this day of mine."

"I'm not joking—I'm just whistling to keep my courage up. If you think this day is anything but deadly serious to me——"

"I know it is. Good-bye—Best Friend!" And Black hung up the receiver on those last words which he would hardly yet have ventured to speak if the two men had been face to face. But his heart was warm with a great love for Red this day—and a great reverent exultation over what was soon to happen. Why not speak the words that soon, call he ever so loudly, could not be heard, except by the hearing of the spirit?

He rushed through his breakfast—it was a banquet, if he had known it, prepared by devoted hands—and all but ran through the early morning streets to the dismantled shop and home on the little side street. Sue admitted him, and took him through to the rear garden where Jane,

in working dress, was packing a box. She stood up, and the colour rushed into her face at sight of him.

"I have my call—I go to-night. I'm the lucky one to go first and leave you behind. But I'm sorry about that, too."

She pulled off the gloves which had protected her hands, unfastened her apron, gave both to Sue, and sent her inside with them. Then she faced him.

"Somehow I knew it was close at hand," she said. "To-night! Well——"

"This afternoon will you go with Doctor and Mrs. Burns and me—and Sue—I should like to take Sue—up to the hills where the Dunstans lived? I want to say a few things to those people up there before I go. I always meant to do it, and never seemed to get around to it. Somehow I can't go away without doing it. And I want you there."

She nodded. "Of course I'll go. I—yes, I'll go—of course. Oh, how glad you are to be off—and how I envy you!"

"Are you coming to church this morning?"

"Oh!—I—think—not."

"Jane!"

She looked up at him and away again. "I don't think I—can," she said.

He was silent for a minute, studying her. In the bright light of the Sabbath morning, there in the garden, she had never seemed to him a more perfect thing. Every little chestnut hair that grew away from her brow, curving upward in an exquisite sweep from her small ear, stood out in that light; the texture and colour of her cheek, the poise of her head upon her white, strong neck—somehow he couldn't help noting these lovely details as he had almost never noted them before. It was as if he saw her through

eyes sharpened already by absence and loneliness. He tried to fix the image of her upon the tablet of his mind—just the sheer physical image of her, as he might have put away a photograph in his pocket, to carry with him. Yet it was something far more subtle than that that he was trying to fix—her whole personality, body and mind and spirit—this was what he found himself wanting to take with him in a way that he could never let go, no matter how far away from her he might be.

"I'm sorry you don't think you can," he said at last, gently. "Do you know that I never even asked it of you before?"

"Do you ask it now? You only said—'are you coming?'"

"Didn't that tell the story? I don't see how I can quite—bear it—if you don't."

"Then—I will. But I shall sit very far back, and you may not even see me."

"I shall see you—if you are there at all."

He had to hurry away then. There was no time to lose if he would do half the things that must be done that day. But long afterward in dark and dreadful scenes, the very antitheses of this one, he could close his eyes and see the little old garden, with its rows of pink and white and deep rose hollyhocks against the vine-covered wall, and see Jane standing in the bright sunlight. He must always remember, too, what it cost him to stand there beside her, and watch her, and know that, as with everything he looked upon that day, it might be for the last time. It had taken every particle of will he had to leave her. Fortunate for him that that will had had a long schooling in doing what it must, not what it would!

Ten o'clock—and Red at the vestry door. Within

that door a strange Red, grave and quiet, facing a circle of surprised and deeply interested men, wondering within themselves how it had ever come about. A dignified candidate was this, who answered questions, as Black had bidden him, in his own abrupt and original way, and more than once startled his questioners not a little. It was at least three times that Black had to use all the tact and discretion at his disposal to prevent a clash of arms when it came to some technicality which to some man's mind was an important one. But in the end they were satisfied. Not one of them but knew that if Dr. Redfield Pepper Burns had come to the point where he was willing to call the old Stone Church his own, it could only be because some deep antagonism had given way—and that, of itself, was enough to commend him to them. Such a power as Red was in the whole community, he could be in the church, if he would. And now that he would, they must let him in, if they were not fools. And fools they were not—and some of them were of those whose knowledge is not wholly of earth, because it has been taught of heaven. So they accepted Red, as well they might, though he was as far from being a saint as any one of themselves, nor ever would be one, while he remained below the stars. The Church Militant is no place for saints, only for human beings who would keep one another company on a difficult road—and the company of One who went before and knows all the hardships—and the glories—of the way.

Eleven o'clock, and Black in his pulpit. He faced a congregation which filled every nook and cranny of the large audience room, and stretched away into the distance in rooms beyond opened for the emergency. News travels fast, and this news had gone like lightning about the town, for a very good reason. Black had summoned only two

of his young men, despatching them to the hills to go from house to house there. But these two, before they went, had done a little despatching on their own initiative, with the result to be expected. It was a great hour, and too great honour could not be done.

As he rose to speak Black's heart was very full. Jane was there—he knew, because he had deliberately watched both doors until he had seen her come in. And she was not far away in a back seat, as she had said she would be. Instead, she had permitted an eager young usher, in search of a place in the already full church, to lead her away down to the very front, though at one side and almost behind a tall pillar. He had seen her slip into this pew, evidently asking to change places with a child who had the pillar seat, one well screened from the rest of the congregation. Once Black had seen her safely in this place, so near him, he breathed more deeply. He could forget everything now, except this, his last chance, with that molten metal he had been making ready for this hour.

"*And He, bearing His cross, went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha.*"

What happens, in the hour when a man gives himself to a task like this; when all that he is, or ever hopes to be, he lays upon the altar of his purpose? Human he may be, and weak, utterly inadequate, as far as his own power goes, to do the thing he longs to do. And yet—well, many a man knows what it is to feel his spirit suddenly strengthen with the hour of need, to feel pour into it something intangible yet absolutely real and definite—and Divine—to know himself able to take the minds and hearts and wills of men into his two human hands and mould them in spite of themselves. And this, as he had hoped and prayed upon his knees, was what happened to

Robert Black this last morning of his ministry to these people. He could not have asked for a greater gift—no, not if by putting out his hand he could have taken Jane's hand and led her away with him. For that hour, at least, as he had wished, the man was lost in the priest; he was consecrated, heart and soul, to his task. How should those before him resist him—the messenger who spoke to them with the tongue of inspiration? For so he spoke.

Christ upon the battle-field—that was his theme. Of itself it was a moving theme; as he made use of it it became a glorious one. Those who listened seemed almost to see a manly, compassionate Figure moving among His young soldiers, living in the trenches with them, facing the fight with them, enduring the long night with them, lifting their hearts, speaking to their spirits—inhabiting the place of the skull as they inhabited it—and when the bullet or the bit of shrapnel had gone home, saying "*I am with you, be not afraid.*"

Who shall describe the preaching of a great sermon? The pen has not been made which may do more than sketch the various outlines of either experience—that of preacher or that of listener, when God thus speaks to human hearts through human lips. Reporter's flying pencil may take down the burning words themselves without an error; only the shadow of the mountain falls upon the plane of his notebook. Preacher may only say: "He spoke through me to-day—somehow I know it"; listener may only think: "I heard what I never heard before, or may again." Only He who inspired the message may know all that it was or half that it accomplished. So it has always been, and so it will ever be—on earth.

The sermon ended; the communion service began. None went away, as ordinarily some were accustomed to

do; it was if a spell had been cast upon the audience, it remained so motionless. Only when, at the very first, a tall figure with a flaming red head came forward at the beckoning of Black, did other heads crane themselves to see. The impossible had happened—no doubt of that. It couldn't be; but yes, it *was* Doctor Burns who was marching down the aisle, to stand facing Black beside the Table on which were set forth the Bread and Wine.

CHAPTER XVII

NO OTHER WAY

"*YOU!*" It was Jane Ray's astonished, all but shuddering thought. "*You!*—and not—*me!* Oh, how can it be? You, who I thought would stay outside with me—and the like of me—forever, before you would bind yourself like this. Do *you* believe the things that he does? *You* could never be a hypocrite Redfield Burns. Are you doing it for love of Robert Black? No, you wouldn't do it, even for that, any more than I would. Then—what *is* it?"

She sat with a white face and watching eyes which burned darkly beneath her close-drawn, sheltering hat-brim, while Red took upon himself the vows which Black administered. When it was done, and Red stood straight and tall again, and Black looked into his eyes and took his hand, and said the few grave and happy words of welcome which end such a service, Jane's heart stood still with pain and love—and envy. It seemed to her that she must get away from the place somehow—anyhow—she could endure no more.

But there was no getting away yet. She had to see it through. And what came next was what Black had told Mrs. Hodder was to come. All through the service, far back in her usual place, the gray-haired housekeeper of the manse had sat, still trembling a little now and then, waiting to hear the blow fall. She it was who knew, she

said to herself, the dreadful thing which was coming. Nobody else, she thought, knew that the minister meant to resign his charge. She didn't see why he must resign it, why he shouldn't come back. He had been here less than a year and a half; he was in the full tide of his success; the big church was his as long as he should choose to keep it. She wondered how they would take it when they knew. As for herself, her heart was very heavy. Who was there, in all the church, who would miss him as she would?

He was speaking. She moved her head and managed to see him through the close-ranged congregation. He had not gone back to the pulpit, he still stood beside the communion table, on the floor below, so it was difficult to get a view of him. He looked very manly and fine, she thought; his face was full of colour, as it always was when he had been preaching, and his black eyes were keen and clear as he looked his people in the face and told them that he was taking leave of them for good. He used few words, and what he said was very simple and direct. He had seen it his duty—and his great, great privilege—to go over to France, and try to do his part. He had preached what he believed with all his heart, and now the time had come to prove that he believed what he had preached. He said good-bye, and God bless them, and wouldn't their prayers go with him that he might be of all the service to the men of his regiment that he could know or learn how to be?

He was withdrawing, that they might act upon his resignation according to custom, and he had all but reached the narrow door beside the pulpit when an impressive figure, that of Mr. Samuel Lockhart, in his well-fitting frock coat of formal wear, rose in his pew. He motioned

to Mr. William Jennings, who sat near this door, and Jennings took a few steps after the departing minister and laid a hand upon his arm.

"Don't go just yet," Jennings warned him, in an excited undertone.

Black turned. Mr. Lockhart spoke his name, and he turned still farther and looked back at his chief officer. Why in the world wasn't he allowed to take himself away at this juncture? Must he be detained to hear a conventional farewell, a speech expressing hope that he would come through unscathed, and thanks for what he had done for the church in the short time that he had been with them? There wasn't much run-away blood in Black's make-up, but he was certainly wishing at that instant that they hadn't thought it necessary to hold him up, and that he had taken those steps toward the door fast enough to get through it and close it behind him before he could be stopped. And then for the hillside and his open-air talk. *That* was what he wanted most—and next! It seemed to him he couldn't breathe any longer, here with the flowers and the people and the organ music and the stained-glass windows! It was his church no longer. . . . Suddenly he knew that his heart was even sorer than he had thought it was.

But there was nothing to do but face it. So he did turn about, and came forward a few steps, and stood waiting. They were all looking at him—all those people—and some of them—why, yes, he could see spots of white all over the church, which grew momently thicker. Could it be that so many people as that were—crying? That sore heart of his gave a queer little jump in his breast. Why, then—they cared—or some of them cared—because he wasn't coming back!

"Mr. Black"—Samuel Lockhart cleared his throat—"we have something to say to you before you go. We want you to know that we deeply appreciate all that you have done for this church in the short time you have been with us"— (yes, Black had known that was what he would say)—"and that though some of us have not always agreed with you in your views on certain points, we have been unable not to respect you. You yourself can testify that we have listened to you, as we have listened to-day, with close attention, always—you have compelled it. But to-day we have listened with a new respect, not to say a deep admiration for you." (Black braced himself. His eyes were fixed steadily upon those of his chief officer. He told himself that it would be over sometime, and then he could get away.) "And we have listened with something else—with a sense of possession such as we have never had before."

Mr. Lockhart cleared his throat again. Evidently this speech was tough on him, too. What in the world did the man mean? A sense of possession—of what?

"You see, we are not merely saying good-bye to you, Mr. Black. That of itself would be enough to make this occasion one long to be remembered. In fact, we are not saying good-bye at all, we are saying 'Till we meet again!' For—if you will have it so—though you are leaving us for the time being, you are going over to do what you consider your part in the war—*as our representative.* The Stone Church refuses your resignation, sir. Instead, it grants you a year's leave of absence which it will extend if you ask it at the end of that period. And it says to you: God-speed to *Our Minister!*"

There was a stir, a murmur throughout the big audience. Handkerchiefs were held suspended in mid-air while

everybody tried his or her best to see the face of Robert Black. In his pew Redfield Pepper Burns had grown redder and redder, till his face rivalled his hair in vividness. Behind her pillar Jane Ray had grown whiter and whiter, as she tried to stifle her pounding heart. At the back of the church young Perkins, usher, all but gave out an ecstatic whoop, and pinched the arm of a neighbouring usher till it was an inflamed red, the victim only grinning back joyfully.

"You surely know," said Robert Black, when he could command his voice, which it took him a full minute to do—"that a man must go with a braver heart in him if he goes—for others, than if he goes by him elf. I thank you—and I accept the commission. God help me to be worthy of your trust."

Of course he couldn't get off till he had had his hand wrung by several hundred people, during which process, as he had expected, Jane slipped away. They wept over him, they smiled tearfully at him, they all but clung to him, but he could bear it now. If he suspected that it was Red who had done this thing for him at the last—the new member already beginning to make himself felt with a vengeance!—it was impossible not to see that now that it was done everybody was immensely glad and satisfied over it. The hardest heads he had ever encountered here were among those who were now proud to have him go from the old Stone Church, the first chaplain in all that part of the country to offer himself from the ministry. Oh, yes—no doubt but it was all right now, and Black would have been a man of iron if that sore heart of his had not been somewhat comforted.

He had dinner alone with Mrs. Hodder, refusing a score of invitations that he might give her this happiness. She

had been up, baking and brewing, since daybreak, and he had divined that it would be a blow to her if he brought even one guest home. He was glad, moreover, of the hour's interval in which to draw breath. He did his best to make the eating of the sumptuous meal a little festival for the woman opposite him, but in spite of his best efforts it partook of the character of the parting bread-breaking.

"You—you won't be getting into danger so much, Mr. Black, will you, as if you was a regular soldier?" Mrs. Hodder suggested timidly, as the dinner drew to a finish with not more than half the food she had prepared consumed. It was the first time her thrifty nature had ever thus let itself go, and she had looked conscience-stricken ever since she realized the situation. But her question voiced the thought uppermost in her mind. It took precedence even of her worry about the terrible waste of which she had been guilty!

"Oh, you're not to be anxious over any danger for me," Black assured her, smiling across the table at her. "Just remember that some day you'll get up another just such splendid dinner as this for me, and then we'll eat it with better appetites. I shall come back ravenous for home cooking, as all soldiers do."

"Then—you'll keep the place open for me, sir?"

"You'll keep it open for me, Mrs. Hodder. It's you who will be in demand for other positions. I'll think myself lucky if you promise to come back to me."

He was glad to get away now from her tearful face, for this assurance upset her completely, and she could only apologize and weep again into a large handkerchief already damp from the demands made upon it at the morning service.

Red and the big Macauley car were at the door now

with Mrs. Burns, Jane Ray, and little Sue Dunstan already established in it. They were off and away at once. Black sat beside Red, and the two fell into talk while those behind silently watched them. They were an interesting pair to watch, in conversation.

"They are so different, one would hardly have expected them to become such devoted friends," Mrs. Burns said to Jane, after a time.

"Oh, do you think they are so different?" Jane glanced from the black head to the red one—they were not far apart. Black's arm was stretched along the back of the seat behind Red; he was leaning close and talking rapidly in Red's ear. The latter was listening intently; from time to time he nodded emphatically, and now and then he interjected a vigorous exclamation of assent. Evidently, whatever the subject under consideration, they were remarkably agreed upon it—which had by no means always been the case in past discussions. Perhaps they were agreeing to agree to-day, since it was the last—for so long.

"They seem to me much alike," Jane went on, at Mrs. Burns' look of inquiry. "Not in personality, of course, but—well—in force of character, and in the way they both go straight at a thing and never let go of it till they have accomplished what they set out to do."

"That's true; it may be the secret of the sympathy between them. For a long time I thought they would never get together, but it's been coming, and now—and to-day—— This has been such a wonderful day, in spite of the sadness of it! You were at morning service?"

"Yes, Mrs. Burns."

"None of us will ever forget it."

"No."

The big car had them up in the hills in short order. As they came over the last steep rise Red whistled sharply with surprise.

"My faith!" he ejaculated. "Where do they all come from, in this God-forsaken region!"

"God hasn't forsaken it. That's a man-made phrase. But they can't all come from this locality. I should say not—and they haven't. . . Why, there are my boys—any number of them. Well!"

Black leaped out of the car, which had been instantly surrounded. Here they certainly were, ranks upon ranks of boys and young men, not only from his church but from the town outside. Every one of them wore a tiny American flag on his coat-lapel.

"You see," explained young Perkins, lively usher at the Stone Church, "we didn't see how we could spare you to come off up here this last day unless we came along. Please excuse us for butting in, but we couldn't stand it any other way."

"We mean it as a sort of guard of honour," declared a tall boy, just out of short trousers, and extraordinarily disputatious for his age, with whom Black had held many a warm argument in past days. "Besides, we——"

Evidently something was on the tip of his tongue which had to be suppressed, for he was hauled off by Perkins in a hurry while others took his place. The young men all seemed much excited, and Black had to bring them to order lest they put the rest of his audience in the background. There were plenty of men and women, and even children present, who were obviously from the hill region, and these were they whom he had come to meet.

Under his direction Perkins shortly proved that his

talents as an usher could be exercised quite as well in the open air as under the stately roof of the home church. He soon had the assemblage massed on a side hill which he had selected as a sort of amphitheatre where all could see and hear the man who stood upon the flat and grassy plateau below. From this point of vantage presently Black spoke to them.

One of the reporters of the morning, at the edge of the crowd, sat taking notes in the very shortest of shorthand. He needed all his powers now, even more than he had needed them in the morning, for Black spoke fast and crisply, as a man speaks when he feels the time is short and there is much to say. As the young reporter set down his dots and dashes he was subconsciously exulting to himself: "Gee, but I'm glad I got in on this! What a bully story this'll make!"

It did make a story, but it was one which like that of the morning could never be fully written. The words Robert Black spoke now were not words like those of the morning. He was looking into faces whose aspect gripped his very soul; it seemed to him that they had all the same expression—one of exceeding hunger. Even his boys—though he was not talking now to them—were watching him as those watch who are being fed. There is no look like that to inspire a man, to draw out his best and biggest, and it drew Black's now, beyond anything of which he had before been capable. The day, the hour, the near approach of his departure, that "last chance" conviction which had spurred him all day—all these facts and forces combined to make of this final, most informal service he was to hold in his own country for many a day the richest and most worthy of them all. If it were not so, then those —Black's nearest friends—who listened with greatest

appreciation and best capacity for judgment, were mightily deceived.

Red stood with folded arms at the very back of the audience, his hazel eyes seldom leaving the figure of his friend. What was in his heart none could have told. His face was set like a ruddy cameo as Ellen his wife looked up at it now and again. Beyond him Jane Ray stood beside a great elm; she leaned a little against it, as if she needed its support. It was a tremendous hour for her, following, as it did, all the repressed emotion of the morning. Her face had lost much of its usual warm colour,—her fine lips tensed themselves firmly against possible tremor. Could she live through the day, she asked herself now and then—live through it and not cry out a recantation of the old position of unbelief, not call to Heaven to witness her acceptance of a new one, passionately believing—and then run into the arms she knew must open for her? But she was dumb. Even he would not trust a change in her now, she was sure, though his eloquence this day had been that to sway far harder hearts than hers. No, she must let him go—there was no other way. She had made her bed and heaped it high with distrust and scorn, and she must lie on it. Even for him she could not take up that bed and walk!

Black ceased speaking. The hush over the hillside, for the full minute following, was that of the calm before the storm. Then—the storm came. Black's young men —twenty of them from the Stone Church—and eleven from the town, thirty-one in all—stirred, looked about at one another, nodded one to another, came forward together.

"Mr. Black," said young Perkins, simply enough—fortunately he had not tongue nor taste for oratory—

"some of us have decided not to let you go 'over there' alone. Of course we can't go with you, though we'd like to mighty well. But we can enlist—and that's what we're doing—to-morrow morning. We thought you'd like to know."

Back up the hillside a smothered sound burst from Red's throat—a queer sound between a groan and a laugh. If Black had heard it, he would have understood what it meant, and his heart would have ached harder than ever for his friend. His wife did understand, and she slipped her hand into his, where he crushed it till it ached with pain, and she did not withdraw it. Beside them Jane Ray bit her lips until they all but drew the blood. Was there no end, then, to the breaking tension of this incredible day?

"I do like to know," said Robert Black, his eyes fiery with joy and sorrow and all the things a man may feel when a group of young patriots offer their all, unknowing half what it means, but understanding enough to make the act enormously significant of forming character, "and I'm proud and happy beyond words."

A hulking young giant from the hills stumbled forward, and spoke diffidently from the edge of the group:

"I guess I'll be goin' too," he said.

Perkins whirled. "Bully for you!" he shouted, and made a flying wedge of himself through the other fellows, to shake the giant's brawny hand.

There came a second hill boy, younger and slighter than the first. "He's my pardner," he said, with an awkward gesture toward the other. "I guess if he goes, that'll mean me too."

There were four of these. Fathers and mothers rose in protest. The first lad turned and faced them.

"Looky here!" he called defiantly. "We ain't goin' to let them city fellers do our fightin', are we? Not on your life!"

That settled it. They were not going to let anything like that happen—not on those unhappy lives of theirs.

It was over. The car got away from the last clinging young hand that would have detained it, and in the long shadows of the late afternoon swung down the hills to the plain below, and the big town, and the last hours of the day. When at length it halted in Jane's narrow street beside her door, above which her little sign no longer hung, Black, getting out with her and Sue, said a word in Red's ear. The other shook his head.

"We'll wait," he insisted. "You've mighty little time to spare now, if you have a bit of a snack with us before your train goes. And I vow we won't let you off from that."

"I don't want to be let off. Give me five minutes here, and I'll be with you."

"We will come back for you at train time, Miss Ray," said Mrs. Burns.

"You don't think best to ask her to supper with us?" questioned Red, as the others disappeared into the now empty shop.

"I asked her and she refused. I knew she would."

"Don't wonder. These blamed last stunts——"

Red lapsed into a dark silence, his chin sunk upon his broad chest.

Within the shop Black turned to Sue. "Go out in the garden, and wait, will you, Sue?" he asked, with the smile which the child would have obeyed no matter what request had gone with it. Reluctantly she closed the shop door behind her. In the dismantled, empty place, where he

had first met Jane nearly eighteen months before, Black said what he had come in to say.

"I shall write—and you will answer. We can't do without that, can we? And there's no reason why we should. Is that understood?"

"If you wish it."

"Don't you wish it?"

"Yes."

"Thank you for standing by me this day. I know it's been hard for you. I couldn't help that—I had to have you. You're not sorry—you stayed by?"

"No."

"Jane—there are a thousand things I want to say to you, but they've all got to go unsaid—except one. Wherever I am—wherever you are—it will be the same with me. There'll be no one else—there never can be, now. I wanted you to know—if you didn't know already."

"Yes."

"Haven't you a word to say to me—Jane?"

She shook her head, trying to smile. "What is there to say? Except—good-bye."

"I wish I could put words into your lips," cried Robert Black, under his breath. "I want to hear you say them so. At least—Jane—I can't go without—once more——"

She was silent. It was somehow as if her will were in shackles, and held her so she could neither move nor speak. When they had been together at the seashore it had been she who had said the more, she who had forced the issue. Now—she was like a dumb thing, suffering without power to free herself. It seemed to her that her heart must break if he did not take her in his arms, and yet she could not show him that heart. The whole day had seemed to build a barrier mountains high between

them, which she could do nothing to lower. Her hands, pressed close to her sides as she stood before him, made themselves into fists, the nails pressing into the firm pink palms until they all but cut the flesh.

Suddenly he reached down and seized the hands in his, then looked at them in amazement, as he drew them up to view, because they did not relax.

"What does this mean?" he asked her quickly. "Are you—as unhappy—as that?"

She lifted her eyes then, and let him see—what he could not help seeing. It was as far beyond what she had let him see on that other day as this day in their lives was greater than that.

"Oh, Jane!—Oh, my dear!" He could only whisper the words. "And I have—to leave you!"

"Yes. Good-bye——" she said again, steadily.

He let go one of her hands, and with his strong fingers made her loosen one gripped fist. Then—the other.

"I can't bear to see them like that," he said, with a queer, tortured smile. "I want——" And he lifted first one palm and then the other to his lips, and then gently closed the fingers again. "Don't hold them so tight again—please!" he said. "I don't want to have to remember them—that way. Jane—I don't know how to go!"

"You must. Doctor Burns is waiting for you. Don't mind about me."

"Don't mind about you!" It was a cry of pain. "Why—you're all I do mind about—now. I've done all the things I had to do to-day—they're all done—everything's done—but this. And this—why, this—is so much the hardest thing of all——"

How could he speak at all, she wondered, when she could not? She did not realize that expression of one

sort or another was the breath of his life to-day. That having poured himself out, all day, to others, he could not cease from giving; that though to-morrow might bring upon him a silence and an immobility as great as her own, for to-day his lips must have speech; his spirit, action.

"Jane—you won't deny me—I can't go without it. God knows our hearts—knows——"

He left his own heart on her lips then, in one bitter-sweet moment of such spending as he had never known—or she—and went away, leaving her alone there in the deserted shop with the memory of his whispered, "God bless you—my Jane!" She ran to the window, screening herself from view as best she could, and saw him get into the car, and saw the car leap away down the narrow street.

An hour later she was at the station. Black had not been in the car when it had come for her; it was full of other people—the Macauleys and the Chesters, Red's neighbours and among Black's best friends. Mrs. Burns explained that the minister's new guard, the boys who were to enlist to-morrow, had come for him in a body, and had borne him away in the biggest car they had been able to find.

At the station there was the expected crowd, only it was a larger crowd than any of them could have anticipated. It was evening now, and almost dark, and it was beginning to rain. The station lights shone on banks of lifted umbrella tops; the little flags in the young men's coats grew wet. People went about saying what a pity it was that it had to rain. And if it hadn't been Sunday night there would have been a band. Jane found herself very thankful that there was no band. And then, suddenly, there was a band—a small one, playing "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and the crowd was singing with it.

Jane wondered, through her dumb pain, how Robert Black was bearing that!

Red was out of the car and off in the crowd—no doubt but he was with Black. He had been heard to express the hope that the blamed train would be on time and cut the agony short, but of course it wasn't. It was only ten minutes late, however, though to Jane those ten minutes, marked by the clock on the car's dash, were the longest she had ever known. Then—there was the shrill whistle in the distance she had been waiting for, coming at an interval in the music, and she heard it plainly, and her heart stopped beating.

Black and Red were at the door of the car—they had had to push their way through the people. Black was shaking hands with Mrs. Burns—with Mrs. Macauley—with everybody. Then Jane felt her hand in his, and lifted her eyes to meet his. The headlight from another car shone full in his face; she saw it as if it looked at her from very far away. But his eyes—yes, she could see his eyes—and see how they were piercing hers, as if he would look through to her very soul for that last time—oh, she was sure it was for the last time!

He did not say a word to her—not a word. But his hand, for that instant, spoke for him. Then he had gone away again, through the crowd, for the train was in, and the locals made but short stops. A shout went up—Black's young men waved their arms, their flags—their unbrellas—everything they had.

He stood on the back platform, as he so often had stood before, when the train pulled out. He looked back at them, the crowds, the flags, the umbrella tops—but he saw only one thing—the thin, gleaming rails, stretching away, farther and farther into the distance—and the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT FOUR IN THE MORNING

THE morning papers! How many did Red have of them?

Robert Black had been away for almost a year. Jane Ray's little shop had been so long closed that few now turned down the narrow street, forgetting that the sign no longer told where the rarest and most valuable things in town surely could be found. People had ceased to ask who was the tall young man with the interesting face who was said to write the most brilliant articles to be found in certain columns of one of the great dailies. Tom Lockhart was gone, and Harry Perkins, and many another figure from the suburban streets. Only an occasional youth could be seen now and then upon a delivery wagon. Girls were everywhere, taking the places of the young men who had gone. Everything was changed—everything; now that war had come so near that it could be felt.

Those morning papers! Red bought and bought, not satisfied with the morning and evening editions delivered at his door. He came home with bundles of them under his arm, and scanned them hurriedly, his face darkening as he read. For the news was heavy news, of losses and reversals, of a gathering tide which could not be stemmed, of worn and wasted French and British regiments falling slowly but surely back because it was not possible to hold

another hour against the tremendous odds of reinforced enemy lines.

"When will we get in? Great God, those fellows can't hold out forever!" Red would shout, dashing the latest paper to the floor where its black and ominous headlines seemed to stare back at him with the inescapable truth in each sinister word. "We'll get into it too late—they can't stand such awful pressure. Oh, if we'd been ready! —instead of sleeping on our arms. Arms—we hadn't any—though they kept telling us—the men who knew. We thought we were fine and fit—we—fat and heavy with easy lives. Yes, we're awake now but we've a long way yet to run to get to the fire, and meanwhile, the world is burning up!"

So he would rage, up and down the long living-room in his own home, unable to find a ray of light in the whole dark situation. Even more poignant than these were his anxieties of a personal sort. Where—when he stopped to think about it—was Robert Black, that he hadn't been heard from now for many weeks? Black had gone across with one of the first divisions, one made up of men many of whom had had former army training, men fit to fight at once, who had gone away believing that they would soon see active service. By great good fortune—or so Black had esteemed it—he had been sent for at the last minute to take the place of an old regimental chaplain who had fallen seriously ill. The substitute's early and persistent applications for a post had commended him as one who meant to go anyhow, and so might as well be given the opportunity first as last. That was the sort they had wanted, for that was the sort they were themselves.

"Why, Bob's last letter's dated a good two months back," Red announced, one June morning of that second

summer, scanning the well-worn sheets. How many times had he read that letter, his wife wondered as she saw him consulting its pages again. Black wrote remarkably interesting letters. In spite of censorship he somehow managed to get in all sorts of vivid paragraphs in which not the sharpest eye could detect forbidden information—there was none there. But there was not lacking keen character drawing, graphic picturing of effect of sun and shadow, stimulating reactions, amusing anecdote. Red had never enjoyed any correspondence in his life as he had that with the chaplain of the ——th regiment, ——th division. And this was for many reasons, chief of which was the great and ever-growing bond of friendship between the two men, which separation just after it had been made forever secure had only served incredibly to strengthen and augment.

"I don't understand it. I don't like it. I wish I could hear," Red complained, replacing the thin sheets in the now tattered flimsy envelope with the foreign postmarks and the official stamps of various sorts which proclaimed it a military missive. "He was writing fairly regularly up to that date, but then he stopped short off, as if he had been shot. Oh, I didn't mean that—queer how that old common phrase needs to be avoided now. It's none too improbable, either, in his case, if he ever gets near the Front. He'll be no rear-guard sort of chaplain—that's easy enough to know."

He went off about his work, on this particular morning, with a heavier heart than usual. He hadn't counted up before, just how many weeks it was since he had heard from Black; he only knew that he had been scanning the mails with a disappointed eye for a good while now. Where could Black be—what had happened to prevent

his writing as before? Hang it!—Red wished he could hear this very day. His mental vision called up clearly the man's handwriting on the foreign envelope; he always liked the look of it so well. It was rather a small script, but very clear, black, and full of character; the t's were invariably crossed with vigour, and there were only straight forward marks, no curlycues. He wished he could see that handwriting within the hour, wished it with a queer certainty that he should most certainly not see it, either to-day or to-morrow. Black was somewhere off the line of communication, he grew surer and surer of it.

As the day advanced Red found his presentiment that his friend was close to danger amounting to a conviction. Red was not an imaginative person, and ordinarily he was a persistent optimist; to-day it seemed to be impossible to summon a particle of optimism concerning either the duration of the war or the personal safety of the man he cared for so deeply. He did care for him deeply—he no longer evaded or made light of his affection for Robert Black. What was the use? It was a fact accomplished; nothing that happened or didn't happen could now change it; everything seemed to intensify it.

Close to eleven o'clock of the evening of this day Red was returning from a call which had taken him out just as he was beginning to think longingly of rest and sleep. Passing a news-stand he had bought the latest evening edition of the latest city daily sent out to the suburbs, and had found in it only a deepening presage of coming disaster to the armies of the Allies. This paper was sticking out of his pocket as he walked wearily along the deserted streets of the residence district, through a night air still and heavy with the lingering heat of the day. He took off his hat and mopped his forehead. Was it hot and

still and heavy with languor and dread over there at this hour, too, he wondered, up on that bending Western front? Or were the shells bursting and the sky red and yellow with the flares of the guns, and black with smoke and death? Allowing for the difference in time it was almost four in the morning over there. Wasn't it about this hour that things were apt to happen, over there, after a night of waiting? Wasn't this often the "Zero" hour—"over there"?

To reach his own home he would naturally go by the manse, unless he went a little out of his way. It must be confessed that Red had acquired the habit, since Black left town, of going that little out of his way, when coming home at night from this part of town, to avoid passing the Stone Church and the deserted manse close by in its large shadow. He didn't know quite why he should have yielded, at first unconsciously, afterward with full recognition of his feeling about it, to the wish not to see the drawn shades and darkened windows of his friend's former habitation. But on this evening, somehow, almost without his own consent he found himself turning at that corner to go by the house.

Dark? Yes, it was dark—almost darker than usual, it seemed; though this was undoubtedly because the nearest arc-light was burning more feebly than ordinarily tonight. Anyhow, the place was enveloped in gloom. It presented a very different aspect from that which had belonged to it during the term of Black's residence. His study had been one of the big square rooms upon the front, its windows always lighted in the evening, the shades drawn only low enough to insure privacy, not to prevent the warm glow of the study light from telling its friendly tale of the occupant within, at home to all comers at all hours, as he had been at pains to make understood.

Red didn't like to look at those dark windows. Many and many a time during the last months before Black's departure, after the friendship between the two men had become a known quantity no longer negligible, the big doctor had turned aside from the straight road home to make a late call in that study, the light beckoning him more and more irresistibly. Weary, or blue, or fuming over some unlucky or harassing happening in his work, he had gone stumbling or storming in, always to find a hearty welcome, and such quiet understanding and comradeship as soon eased the situation, whether he knew it then or only afterward. Many a pipe had he smoked while sitting in Black's old red-cushioned rocker—to which he had taken an odd fancy—and many a story had he told, or listened to. . . . There could be no pipe-smoking there to-night, nor telling of stories. The fire upon that hearthstone was cold. God only knew when it would be lighted again, or whose hand would light it.

Red turned in at the walk which led to the manse door. He did not want to turn in, yet he could not go by. The lawn before the house was shaven; it had to be kept up because there was no dividing line between it and the close-cut green turf which surrounded the Stone Church. Between the vestry door and side door of the manse ran a short walk, so that the minister had only a few steps to take when he crossed the narrow space. Somehow Red could almost see the tall, well-built figure striding across that space, the strong face full of spirit. . . .

He took a turn about the house, completely circling it, telling himself that now he was here he might as well see that all was as it should be from front to rear. Returning to the front, he heard a distant clock in the centre of the town booming out the slow strokes of the hour—

eleven. Four o'clock it was then on that Western front, three thousand miles away. Was Black there—or anywhere near there? Wherever he was it might be that—well—was there any reason why Red shouldn't be able to get him out of his mind? And was there any reason why Red shouldn't do what he was now suddenly impelled to do? According to Black's own code there was every reason why he should do it—and none conceivable against it. Sentimental superstition?—or great spiritual forces at work of which he could know nothing, except to feel their power?

He went over to the vestry door—a narrow door of classic outline and black oak austerity, appearing in the deep shadow like the entrance to the unknown. He leaned his uplifted arm against it, and rested his bared head against his arm. Somehow he felt nearer to his absent friend in this spot than he had ever felt before.

"O God," he implored, under his breath, "wherever he is—take care of him. He's worth a lot of taking care of—and he won't do it himself—somehow I know that. Just do it for him—will You?"

On this same night, at a Field Hospital, ten miles back from the firing line on a certain sector of the French Front, Jane Ray went about her duties. It was a comparatively quiet night; no fresh casualties had come in for several hours, and none was expected before morning.

Beginning as nurses' helper Jane had worked and studied at all hours, had faced several examinations, and was now, by virtue of the pressing demand and the changed requirements which in war time hasten such matters, an accredited nurse with a diploma. She had thought many times gratefully of a certain red-headed surgeon back in

the States, who had put her through many grilling tests of his own since he had learned what she had in view. Not once but often she had watched him operate; hours on end had she listened to informal lectures from his lips, delivered at the back of her shop when custom was slack. It had all helped immensely in her work of preparation, and in her dogged purpose to make herself fit for service in the least possible time. And now she was at the very goal of her desires, having for the last month been serving as near the active Front as a nurse may get, the Field Hospital to which the wounded are sent from the First-Aid Station.

It had become to her an almost passionate joy to give these poor fellows their first sense of real comfort. Though the resources at hand were often far less than adequate to the demand, when cases poured in till the hurriedly arranged accommodations were full to overflowing and there was no such thing as supplying every need, this was the time when Jane most exulted in her work. Physically strong, though she was often weary to exhaustion, a few hours of sleep would put her on her feet again, and she would go back to her task with a sense of being at last where she was born to be. She managed somehow to give to her patients the impression that no matter how busy or hurried she might be she had something to spare for each one of them, and this perhaps was one of the greatest services she rendered. Skilful though her hands and brain had become at ministering to the wants of the wounded bodies, her heart had grown still wiser in its knowledge of the larger needs of the tried spirits of those who lay before her. Tender yet bracing was the atmosphere which she carried everywhere with her. It is the aura which to a greater or less degree surrounds every

true nurse, and Jane, in acquiring it, had but learned the rudiments of her profession. Yet perhaps she had rather more than the ordinary capacity for divination of the peculiar and individual necessities of the men under her care, for certain it was that most of them preferred her to any of the others, accomplished and devoted though they all were. It is quite possible that the fact that she was, as the boys put it among themselves, so "easy to look at," may have accounted for a portion of her popularity, but surely not for all.

They did not stay long with her; it was a matter of but a few days in most cases, before they were moved back to the Evacuation Hospital, many miles in the rear. She had not time to get to know any of them well; yet somehow in even that brief interval of experience she and they usually arrived at a feeling of acquaintance which often became a memory not to be forgotten.

On this June night Jane found herself returning more than once to a certain patient who had been brought in early in the evening suffering from rather severe injuries. The surgeons had decided against immediate operation; he was to be retained here only long enough to recover from shock, and to be got into shape for the journey back to the Base. He was only a boy, or looked so, in spite of the lines which pain had brought into his face. He was not able to sleep, and for certain definite reasons he had been given nothing to make him sleep. Each time Jane came by she found him lying with eyes wide open; restless of body his injuries did not permit him to be, for he was strapped and bandaged into a well-nigh immovable position. Clearly his mind was doing double duty, and being restless for both.

As she stopped beside his cot again, he looked up at her

and spoke, for the first time. His eyes had followed her all night, whenever she came in range, but she was used to that. Eyes wakeful at night always follow a nurse; she is a grateful vision to men long removed from the sight of women; the very lines of the uniform are restful to look at. The face beneath the veil-like head-dress need not be a beautiful one to be attractive; it needs only to be friendly and compassionate; if it can show a capacity for humour, so much the better. In Jane's case, actual loveliness of feature drew the gaze of those tired young eyes, many of which had seen only ugliness and horror for a long, long time. The casualty cases thus far had been confined almost entirely to the French and British, with an occasional American enlisted in a foreign division. It was only within the last few days that the men from Jane's own country had begun to come under her care, showing that at last, as they had so longed to be, they were "in."

This boy, beside whom Jane paused in her rounds, and who now spoke to her, had had from the first something familiar about him. But she had not been able to place him in her remembrance and had decided that it was only the type she recognized, not the individual. Now, however, as she bent to catch the low-spoken words, she realized what had happened; here was a boy from home!

"You don't know me, do you?" he said, with difficulty.

"I almost thought I did, but wasn't sure. Do you come from my town and ought I to know you? You see—you must have changed quite a bit."

She was looking intently into his face, and her reassuring smile answered his wistful one.

"No, I didn't expect you to know me, but I—kind of

hoped—you would. I know you. You was there when I said I'd enlist—up on the hill."

Her thoughts leaped back to that last Sunday of Robert Black's departure and to the service on the hillside. Her face lighted with recognition, and the boy saw it.

"Oh, yes—I do remember—of course I do. I sewed a star on a service flag for you and the other three who went from the hill, and took it up to the schoolhouse before I went away. I think I know your name." She racked her memory hastily for it and found it, and the boy's eyes were suffused with joy as she spoke it. "Aren't you—Enos Dyer?"

"Yes, I'm Enie Dyer, only I don't like to be called that over here 'cause it sounds like 'Heinie.' Say,"—he scanned her face anxiously,—"know anything 'bout where the preacher is now?"

"Mr. Black? Nothing at all. It is weeks since I had any news of him. His division has been sent up toward the Front, and they may be in things by now; we get only rumours here about what is happening on the other sectors."

"I wish I knew," he said anxiously. "I get to thinkin' 'bout him a lot. He didn't know me any, but I knew him all right. After that time he buried the Dunstan girl I used to come down to his church. I liked to hear him talk. But I always skun out the minute things was over, so he never really did lay eyes on me till that last day. I don't s'pose he'd remember me."

Jane would have liked to let him say more, to have questioned him closely, herself eager to hear the least mention of the name which was always in the background of her thoughts. But she knew that he must not be allowed to use his feeble powers in this way. So after as-

suring him that Black was not the man to forget the four boys from the hill who had enlisted on that memorable day, she went on upon her rounds, her own mind filled with the vivid recollections young Dyer's words had called up.

But she could not come near him on this night without his eyes imploring her to give him another word. So she learned that he was most unhappy lest the injuries he had received prevent his return to the Front, and was worrying badly about it. She became presently so interested in his state of mind that she called the attention of one of the surgeons to him. Doctor Mills read the record upon his cot-tag, looked at Dyer keenly through his big horn spectacles, and smiled, his own tired, thin face relaxing its tense look of care.

"You'll get back, my lad," he said, "when they've fixed you up. With that spirit you'll get anywhere."

Enos Dyer's lips trembled. "It's all right, then," he murmured, with a sigh of relief. "I haven't done nothin' yet, an' I figger to, 'fore I get through."

"What were you doing when you got these?" The surgeon indicated Dyer's bandaged shoulder and his slung leg.

"Just tryin' a little job o' my own, sir."

"Not under orders?"

"Well, I guess I was under orders, sir—but the gettin' through was sort o' up to me."

"I see. You're a company runner?"

"Yes, sir."

The surgeon went away. Jane did what she could to induce sleep for Dyer, who needed it badly, but his eyes were still wide when dawn drew near. By and by, as she came to give him water, which he drank thirstily, he said slowly:

"Did you hear the preacher the time he told about that feller Daniel in 'mongst the lions?"

"No, I don't think so, Enos."

"I was just wonderin' if *he* was in 'mongst 'em now, anywheres. If he is, I guess he won't get hurt. I've thought about that story a lot since I heard him tellin' it. I guess if God could take care of anybody when lions was walkin' all 'round him, He could do it when anybody was fightin', don't you? And I guess the preacher's fightin', wherever he is."

Jane's lips smiled a little. "Chaplains don't fight, you know."

"I'll bet *he* does," Dyer insisted.

She didn't try to change his conviction, but somehow it took hold of her; and presently, in a strange hush that fell just before the dawn, when there came a cessation of sound of the guns which usually were to be heard clearly at this distance from the Front, she stood in a doorway that faced the east and took a well-worn letter from her pocket. In the faint light from within the ward her eyes once more scanned lines she already knew by heart.

Letters from Black had reached her infrequently and the latest was dated weeks ago. Of course he could give her no details of his movements, neither past nor expected; she understood also that he could say little of that which was personal to himself and Jane. No man writes for the scrutinizing eye of a censor that which he would say to one alone. Yet somehow he had managed to convey a very vivid sense of his presence, and of his constant thought of her, in the midst of his work among his men. The last paragraph, especially, was one to stay by her while she should have a memory, reserved though the words were:

"I am very sure that in all this experience you are having you must find the thing I so much want you to find. How can you escape it? It is all around you. I can't get away from it a minute. You know what I mean. I never felt it so strongly, nor so depended upon it. Every hour it is in my thought of you. You are well up toward the Front now, I suppose. At any time a bomb may be dropped on your Hospital; it is always a shining mark for the enemy. Yet I am not anxious about you. For this I know:—whatever happens to you or me, it can do no harm to the eternal thing which is ours."

She read the words again and again. Well she knew what they meant; in spite of the restraint in them they were full to the brim with his feeling toward her. Where was he now—near—or far? There had been a rumour here that the division in which he served had been suddenly rushed from its training trenches to the Front, in a desperate attempt to stem the creeping enemy tide threatening to become a deluge and wash away all defences. There were many rumours; few could be trusted. But it might easily be true; he might at this very hour be under fire, even though he remained in the shelter of trench or dugout. Would he stay in such shelter? The question had never occurred to her in just this form before. Her ideas of the duties of a regimental chaplain were all based on the knowledge that he was a non-combatant, like Cary. She had had far more fears for her brother, with his temperament, full of recklessness and daring, than for Robert Black. But now, though she scouted the idea of Black's actually fighting, she had a sudden vision of him in danger. If he had gone with his men up to those front lines, where was he to-night?

Suddenly the distant sky-line burst into flame before her

eyes. She had seen it before, that sky-line, during the months since she had come to the Field Hospital, but always before it had been when she was too busy to stop to look at it. Now, in the brief breathing space, she was at leisure to study it in all its sinister significance, and to listen to the distant thunder of the guns.

He might not be there—she was very sure he was not, for the returning wounded brought fairly accurate reports of what divisions were engaged in the fighting in this sector. But somewhere—somewhere—on that long, bending line, stretching over so many long miles, and now grown so thin and in many places so dangerously weak compared with the ever augmenting enemy forces—somewhere there he might be. According to that persistent rumour the American troops who had been rushed forward were at a point less than twenty miles away. Whatever happened, however, none of them would come through this particular Field Hospital, and it might be very long before she would know definitely how near Black had been to actual danger.

She looked at her little service watch—it was just past four. She must go back: it would not be long now before the ambulances would be rushing in with the fresh wounded sent back from that angry sky-line. The stretcher-bearers would be setting their woeful burdens down before her, and all she had to give must be theirs, for the hour.

For a moment she closed her eyes. She still held the letter in her hand; she lifted it and laid her cheek against it; then she pressed it to her lips.

"Oh, wherever you are," she breathed, "I think you need me. I think you are thinking of me. But whether you are or not—I'm there.—Oh, Robert Black—*I'm there!*"

In a narrow, winding, muddy ditch—which was all it was, though it went by another name—with short, ladder-like places for the ascent of its sides here and there, Robert Black was waiting, with a detachment of his men, for a certain hour, minute and second previously fixed by orders received in the early evening. He was at a crisis in his experience which he had known would come some day, but it had been long delayed. Now it was at hand. These men with whom he had been stationed, throughout their voyage overseas, their foreign training, and their slow and tedious progress toward the French Front, were about to receive their first real test. At that fixed early morning hour they were going for the first time "over the top."

By now Black knew most of them pretty well. In the beginning they had received him cautiously, watching him closely, as a man who comes to a regiment with a cross on his collar is bound to be watched. They hadn't particularly liked their former chaplain, whose place Black had taken at almost the last hour before they sailed. This man had never been able to get very near to them, though he had tried conscientiously and persistently to do so. They weren't exactly prejudiced against chaplains—they supposed they were somehow necessary and unavoidable adjuncts of military service—but they didn't see so very much use in having them at all. So when Black came they had looked him over curiously and not without a certain amount of prejudgment.

The voyage over had been a rough one; a large proportion of the men had been seasick. Black, who had crossed the Atlantic many times on those trips back home to see his mother, was a first-rate sailor, and he had had his first chance with his men during those long days of storm and

wet and dark discomfort. He had made the most of it, though he had taken care not to overdo the effort to bring cheer to those who if not seasick were mostly homesick, whether they succeeded in concealing it or not. He had gone about quietly but efficiently, and the impression he had given had been that of one who had cast in his lot with his regiment for better or for worse, though he wasn't making any fuss about it.

When they had reached the other side and gone into camp, they soon discovered that the first impression they had had of their chaplain held; that he meant to share and share alike with them whatever fell to their lot. Though he rated as captain and had therefore the right to associate with the officers and to mess with them, he didn't seem to be spending much time at it. He was very good friends with those in authority, who seemed to like him; but he apparently cared more about making friends with the private in the ranks than with the Major, or the Colonel commanding. He was not a joke-maker; he didn't slap the boys on the shoulder nor shout at them; but he carried about with him an atmosphere of good cheer of a quiet sort. And when, now and then, it came to a contest of wits, and somebody tried to put the chaplain in a corner, he was sure to find his way out with a quick and clever retort which brought the laugh without making things too uncomfortable for the cornerer—unless he deserved it, in which case he was pretty sure to wish he hadn't spoken.

As to preaching—they crowded to hear him, after the first tentative experiment. The same unescapable logic, the same clear and challenging appeal, the same unafraid plain-speaking which had won Redfield Pepper Burns won these men—who were only boys after all. When it came

to the matter of preaching they were keen and merciless critics. They didn't want to be talked down to; they didn't like to be beguiled into listening with song and dance; they wanted a man if he were going to speak to them at all to do it without mincing, or setting traps for their attention. They wanted him to look like a man and act like a man—and unequivocally and all the time *be* a man. In the nature of things, it wasn't difficult for Robert Black to fill this bill. A great many words have been written in the effort to tell what soldiers want—if they want anything at all—from their chaplain. They are not hard to satisfy, critical though they are and pitiless, when they detect failure to measure up to their requirements. The greatest of these requirements is certainly simple enough and just enough; it's only what is required of themselves, which is to be men and comrades, to the last ditch.

It was not the last ditch, but the first one, to which they had come this night. The trench was like other trenches, but they had not been in a front-line trench before; somehow it seemed different. The troops whose place they had taken were worn and dog-weary, they had quitted the place with evident satisfaction; they had held it five days after they had expected to be relieved—it was a mighty good place to get out of. And now, it was the new arrivals' turn to face the music of the shells and the machine-gun fire and the snipers' bullets—and all the rest that was waiting for them. Their chance had come at last.

Black had been ordered to stay in the rear, but he had courteously disputed the order, had had it out with his superior officer and had been told to go along. This, he understood, was a mere matter of form, to try him out.

A chaplain had a perfect right to go where he would with his men, provided he had the nerve. And why shouldn't Black have the nerve? He had been cultivating it for a good many years now, and having been born in Scotland he had started out with rather more than his share of it in the beginning. Besides, are shot and shell the only things to try what a man is made of?

The men in the trench liked having their chaplain with them; there could be no doubt of that, though they by no manner of means said so. They hadn't been expecting to have him accompany them to the very Front, and when he came along as a matter of course they were glad of it. His uniform by now was quite as mud-stained and worn as theirs; the only difference was that they were expecting to get bullet holes in theirs, while his, they considered, with any sort of luck would be kept intact, Even so, he was a good sport to stay by until the very last moment, and they appreciated it. He was a comfortable sort to have around. He wasn't old enough to be the father of any of them, but he was something like an older brother. And there was one thing about him they very definitely enjoyed, and that was his smile. It wasn't a broad grin, but it was a mighty nice one, and when any man had said something that brought that pleasant laugh to Bob's lips, that man always felt decidedly warm and happy inside. Because—well—the chaplain didn't go around grinning conscientiously at everybody all the while, and his smile wasn't the easiest thing in the world to win. Yes, the secret is out—they called him "Bob" behind his back, and they called him that because they liked him in that capacity of elder brother. To his face they called him "Parson."

It was very still and dark in the trench; the raid was to

start with the opening of the barrage which would cover the advance. Night—and darkness—and quiet—and the hour before dawn at which the courage of the sons of men is at its lowest—no wonder that hearts beat fast and faces slackened colour beneath the tan, and the minutes at once crawled and raced. They were unquestionably nervous, these boys, hard as they tried to keep cool as veterans. How would they acquit themselves?—that was the thing that worried them. For the fact was that in this particular company there was not one who had ever seen actual warfare; they were all yet to be tried.

Black went from one to another, taking whispered messages, hastily scrawled notes, which they gave to him, and making clear his understanding of the various requests. They all wanted to shake hands with him, seeming to feel that this was the proper farewell to take of him who was to stay behind. He wasn't armed, though he wore a helmet and gas mask, like themselves; his hands were free to take their consignments, as his spirit was free to put courage into them. Not that they realized that he was doing it; all they knew was that somehow after they had had a word with him, and felt that warm handshake of his, they knew that they were stronger. He believed in them—they understood that—and they meant to measure up. That was about what his presence amounted to, which was quite enough.

One boy, a slender fellow, not long out of hospital where he had been sent for a run of an epidemic disease, came to Black at almost the last moment with a diffident question. "Parson," he whispered, "I want you to do something for me. If I—if I should get scared out there—or anything—and the boys should know about it—and it got around—or anything—I—I—wish you'd see it didn't

get back to my Dad. He—always said I'd get over bein' —shaky—when the time came. But—Parson, would you think it was awful wrong to—lie about it for me a little? You see, it would cut Dad up like everything—and I couldn't bear——"

Black put his lips close to the young ear. "I won't have to lie, Joe," he said. "I haven't the least doubt of you—not the least. Do you get that? I'm telling you the absolute truth."

In the darkness Joe smiled. After a moment he whispered back. "Well, I guess I'll have to buck up," he said.

"You've bucked up now," came back the whisper, and Black's hand clasped his arm tight for an instant. "What a muscle you've got, Joe!" he declared.

The arm stiffened, the muscle swelled. "You bet," agreed the boy proudly, and hitched up his cartridge belt. "That's what trainin' does to a fellow. Well—good-by, Parson."

"God be with you, Joe! He will—remember that."

"Yes, sir—if you say so." And Joe walked away, less "shaky" than he had come.

Then, presently, it was the "Zero" hour. With the first boom and crash of the covering barrage the men were up and over the top. The farthest man in the line was Joe. No, not the farthest, though Joe had been assigned that place, for beyond and beside him, as he went over, was Robert Black.

CHAPTER XIX

A SCARLET FEATHER

Dear Sis:

I'm going to cease setting down the big stuff for a space, while I write to you. I'm just back with a whole skin from spending the night up a tree watching this man's army pull off a great stunt in the way of a surprise for the enemy. I've sent off my stuff for my paper and am now resting up—but a letter is due you, and I've found a way to get it to you by special delivery. The messenger starts in half an hour by motorcycle for your sector, and vows he'll put it in your hands as soon as he's handed over his dispatches to the C. O. So I can let myself go a bit—if I scrawl fast.

I've had great luck this last month in meeting up with at least three people whom you'll like to hear about. First:—R. M. B.—by the merest chance, for an hour later I'd have missed him. I simply turned a corner in a little French town where I'd stopped with an officer who was taking me with him up to the Front, and ran square into a black-eyed chap with a cross on his collar who was so tanned and so husky I didn't snap to for a full minute. He did, though—and had me gripped with a grip like a steel trap. "Cary Ray!" he shouted. I knew the voice—I couldn't forget that voice in a hurry—and of course instantly then I knew the man. Jolly! Jane, you ought to see him.

Well, he hadn't a minute to spare for me, unless I'd go with him. "Sure thing," I agreed. "I've got an hour to spare while Major Ferguson checks up with G. H. Q. here. What's your little party?"

"It's a burial party," said he, looking me in the eye, same as usual. "If you haven't had that particular experience, it won't hurt you, and on the way we can talk things over."

As it happened I'd passed up the funerals, thus far, being oc-

cupied exclusively with the living and those on the other side I wanted to see dead. Anyhow, it was worth it to have an hour with this particular chaplain, whatever job he was at. So I went along. I haven't time to describe it to you here, but you can bet it rated a special half column for my paper. It was a mighty simple little affair, no frills, just a group of sober doughboys, a flag, some wooden crosses, and a firing squad—*and* R. M. B. reading the service. But don't you think "the Resurrection and the Life" didn't get over to us!

On the way to the field and back I heard a great piece of news. R. M. B's regiment had been sent back into rest billets, about a fortnight before, and a group of entertainers had come through the little town one evening and put on a show for them. It was some show, and the bright particular star was—oh, you never could guess if you hadn't a clue, any more than I could. Well, it was Fanny Fitch! Yes, sir—over here with a bunch of vaudeville people, going around the leave areas and cheering up the boys before the next bout. You should have heard the chaplain describing the song and dance; I never should have thought it! Fanny can't sing a whole lot—just enough to get by, I judge; but dance she can, and jolly she does, and the boys fall for it like rows of tenpins. The best of it, according to R.M.B., is that she's happy as a summer cloud doing her bit. Why, she's just plain got into the game, Sis, as I told her to do, and I don't know what more you can ask of anybody. You're nursing, and the chaplain's preaching—and burying—and if he isn't fighting before he gets through I'll be surprised, knowing how pugilistic he can be. And I'm skirmishing on the edge of things with my fountain pen, and Fanny Fitch is making eyes at the boys and warming the cockles of their tired hearts—bless her heart! And why isn't her job as good as any of ours, since it helps the morale as it's bound to do? All I know is I'm going to tear things loose and get to see her as soon as I can make it, lest some nervy shave-tail lieutenant get a line on her while my back is turned.

Time's up. The third meet-up? You'd say it couldn't happen, but it did. It was a week earlier than this that I stood on the side of the road and watched a couple of battalions march by on their way to the training trenches in a quiet sector. And behold there was a first lieutenant as *was* a first lieutenant, and his name

back in the States was Tommy Lockhart! Talk about making a man of a man—you ought to see our Tom!

Luck to you and love to you——

Always your same old

CARY.

He finished it in a hurry, for the Colonel's messenger could not be kept waiting. After that he did some manipulating and manœuvring, which in the end resulted, a few days later, in his getting the chance he wanted. What Cary could not bring about in one way he could in another, and more than one officer and man in authority, if he had owned up honestly, would have had to admit that a certain war correspondent had a way of asking favours which it was somehow difficult to refuse. Cary's face was his fortune, for it was the face of a modest but high-spirited non-combatant who was afraid of nothing so that he should fulfil his commission. Usually he was asking to be sent to the most active front, and pressing his case; so now when he wanted to make a dash to the rear, without explaining why, those who could further his request were glad to do so. It therefore presently came about that young Ray made his trip in an official car, in the company of several officers, with a number of hours to spare before the return in which to hunt up a certain group of entertainers, which he meant to locate or perish in the attempt. The more he thought about that "shave-tail lieutenant" and others of his ilk, the more eager he was to remind Fanny Fitch of his presence in this new world of hers.

The hunt took so much time that it began to look as if Cary's usual luck had deserted him, when he came rather suddenly upon his quarry. It was the edge of the evening, and the edge of a French town in which was quartered a division on its way to the Front. A big audience of men

was seated on the grass watching a performance taking place on an improvised platform, lighted with flaring torches. At the moment of Cary's arrival a young violinist was playing softly a series of haunting Scottish airs, and a hush had fallen over the listeners which spoke of dangerous susceptibility at a time when men must not be permitted to grow soft with dreams, But before this state of mind had had a chance to make serious inroads, the fiddler changed his tune. He dashed without warning into a popular marching song, a lad with a concertina leaped upon the stage, and a girl in a scarlet skirt, a black velvet coat, and cap with a long, scarlet feather, ran out from a sheltering screen. In her arms she carried a great flaming bunch of poppies, and over them she laughed down at her audience. Standing on the step below the stage she began to sing.

It was just such a song as Cary Ray—and most of the boys before him—had heard a thousand times. The singer, as he had written Jane, had no real voice for singing, only a few clear tones which, the moment the notes of the song took her above or below the middle register, became forced and breathy; but somehow that didn't much matter. She had a clear enunciation, she had youth and a delightfully saucy smile, and she had—well—what is it which makes all the difference between one such performer and another—that elusive quality which none can define, but which all can recognize? Spirit, dash, beauty—they were all there—and something else—something new—something irresistible. What was it? Trying to discover what it was, Cary gradually made his way forward, slipping from one position to another through the seated ranks without ever lifting his body high enough to attract attention. Nearer and nearer he came to the

front, and clearer and clearer grew his view of Fanny's laughing face. He didn't want her to recognize him so he kept his own face well in shadow, though he knew that in the torchlight her audience must be to her mostly a blur of watching eyes and smiling lips, and masses of olive-drab. He came to a halt at length well sheltered behind a young giant of a corporal, around whose shoulder he could peer in safety. And then he looked for all he was worth at the girl who was holding these boys in the grip of her attraction, and doing with it what she would.

And what was she doing with it? What could Fanny have been expected to do? It was undoubtedly her chance to capture more masculine admiration in the lump than had ever been her privilege before. There were a goodly number of officers in her audience, mostly lounging in the rear of the ranks upon the grass, but none the less for that foemen worthy of her steel. She had every opportunity to use her fascinations with one end, and only one, in view. In satisfying her own love of excitement, she could easily, under the guise of entertainment, do these boys in uniform more harm than good. To tell the honest truth it was with this fear in mind that Cary now watched her. Great as had been her attraction for him in the past, so great did he expect it to be for these others now—and it had not been possible in that past for him to fail to recognize the subtle nature of that attraction.

He studied her from the shelter of the broad shoulder in front of him with the eyes of a hawk. Let Fanny give these young Americans one look which was not what Cary Ray wanted it to be, and he would steal away again as quietly as he had come and never let her know. He wasn't sure that "R. M. B." would have recognized what he himself would, in the situation; and the fact that Black

had spoken with such hearty praise of Fanny's performance hadn't wholly served to reassure him. She had known from the beginning that the chaplain was present in her audience—that would make a difference, of course. She didn't know now who was here; Cary would see her exactly as she was. It was no chaplain who was watching her now, it was an accredited war correspondent with every faculty of observation at the alert, his memory trained to keep each impression vivid as he had received it.

It was a long time that Fanny was upon the rough stage, for her audience couldn't seem to have enough of her. Again and again they recalled her, having hardly let her pass from sight. It was difficult to analyze the absorbing interest of her "turn," made up as it was, like patchwork, of all sorts of unexpected bits. Song and story, parade and dance—one never knew what was coming next, and when it did come it might be the very slightest of sketches. It was very evidently her personality which gave the whole thing its attraction; in less clever hands it might have fallen flat. Yet through it all seemed to run one thread, that of genuine desire to bring good cheer without resort to means unworthy.

Yes, that was what Cary had to concede, before he had looked and listened very long. Though she was using every art which he had known she possessed, and some he hadn't known of, she was doing it in a way to which he could not take exception. Though he was becoming momently more jealous of all those watching eyes because he could see how delighted they were, he grew surer and surer that Fanny was definitely and restrainedly doing the whole thing as the boys' sisters might have done it, if their sisters had been as accomplished as she. His heart warmed to her as it had never warmed before. After all,

Cary said to himself, this war had done something splendid to Fanny Fitch as well as to everybody else. She wasn't a vampire, she was a good sport, and she was playing up, playing the game, with the very best that was in her, just as R. M. B. had said. And Cary was glad; he was gladder than he had ever been about anything.

The moment she had finally left the stage, and the sleight-of-hand man who was the other member of the little company had secured the reluctant attention of the audience, loth to let Fanny go, Cary wormed his way to one side and out of the torch-light into the clear darkness now fully fallen. He went around behind the screen, and found a slim figure in scarlet and black sitting with violinist and concertinist upon a plank, placed across two boxes. An older woman with a plain face and fine eyes looked up at Cary and shook her head at him with a warning smile. Evidently she was in charge, and very much in charge, of this girl who was travelling about France with men performers among so many men in uniform. But before she could send him away Fanny herself had looked up from a letter she was reading by a flash-light the little concertinist was holding for her.

She sprang up with a smothered exclamation of joy and came to him. The older woman rose also and followed her. Fanny turned to her.

"It's an old friend, Mr. Ray—Mrs. Burnett." She made the introduction under her breath, for at the moment the audience on the other side of the screen was silent, watching a difficult trick. "He's a war correspondent, and I'm sure hasn't long to stay. Please let me talk with him, just outside here."

So, in a minute, when Cary had disarmed the duenna with his frank and friendly smile, he led Fanny a stone's-

throw away, just out of the flare of the torches, and looked down into her face.

"Well," he said, "here we are! And you're playing the game, for all that's in it. I'm pleased as Punch that you've come along. Tell me all about it, quick. I've got to be back in the car that brought me in half an hour, not to delay Colonel Brooks."

"Then there isn't time to tell you all about it," Fanny answered, "and there's nothing to tell, either, except what you see. I am very happy to be of use—as I think I am."

"I should say you were. I've been watching you for a full half-hour, and I never saw a jollier stunt put over. In that red and black you beat anything in pink and white I ever saw—to speak figuratively. You see—I've only seen you in pink and white, before!"

Fanny laughed. "And I've never before seen you in olive-drab. You're perfectly stunning, of course. How did you know I was here—or didn't you know?"

"The chaplain of the ——th told me," Cary explained, watching her.

"Oh, yes!" Fanny's eyes met his straightforwardly. She was made up for the stage but he didn't mind that, because he knew it had to be. "It was so strange to see him, in uniform. He's looking every inch a soldier, isn't he?—even though he's not one."

"I'm not so sure he isn't. Yes, he's great—and you're greater! It's all in the nature of things that he should come over and do his bit, but you could hardly have been expected to do yours."

"Why not? Just because I've always been a frivolous thing, is that any reason why I shouldn't sober down now and be useful?"

Cary smiled. "You don't look exactly sobered down, you know," he told her, glancing from the dashing scarlet feather in the little cap set at an angle on her blonde head, to the high-heeled scarlet slippers on her pretty feet.

"Oh, but I am. I'm giving myself more seriously to being a little fool than I ever did to trying to seem wise."

"And in doing it, you're wisest of all!" Cary exulted. "Fanny—I've something to tell you. I wouldn't have been sure once, whether it was something that would give you pleasure to hear or not, but—yes—I'm fairly sure now. You knew—you must have known, what I used to be, though you didn't see much of me till that was pretty well over. I want you to know that—it's all over now. I've had every sort of test, as you may imagine, since I left Jane—and Mr. Black, and Doctor Burns—the people who stood by me when I was down—and I haven't given in once. Perhaps I will give in, some day, but I don't think it. You see—I can't disappoint them. And—I'd like to think—you care too whether—I make good."

A great burst of applause came from the ranks upon the grass, followed by a roar of laughter. Cary drew Fanny a step or two farther away, though they two were already in deep shadow, made the deeper by contrast with the circle of radiance cast by the torches.

"Of course, I care," she answered, and he strained his eyes in the darkness in the effort to see her face. "Cary, I want *you* to know that—ever so many things look different to me, over here. I—perhaps you won't believe it, but it's true—absolutely true—that when I face an audience like that one out there I feel like—almost like—a mother to those boys. And I just want to—be good to them—and help them forget the hard things they've seen, for a little while."

He could have laughed aloud, at the idea of ever hearing anything like this from the lips of Fanny Fitch. Yet, somehow, he could not doubt that there was truth in the astonishing words, and it made him very happy to hear them. There had been that in her performance, as he had observed, which gave strong colour to this point of view. Certainly, the experience of being close to the heart of the great struggle was doing strange things to everybody. Why should it not have worked this miracle with her?

"Fanny—" he felt for her hand, and took it in both his, while he stooped lower to speak into her face,—"do you know that you and I are a lot alike? It's supposed to be that people who are alike should steer clear of each other, but I'm not so sure. You and I are always keyed up to a pitch of adventure—we like it, it's the breath of life to us. I can understand it in you—you can, in me. Why shouldn't we go after it—together? Why couldn't we make a wonderful thing of our lives, doing things together? Why, if I could have made an airman, for instance—as I'd have liked mightily to do if I hadn't been a newspaper man and had my job cut out for me—I can imagine your being ready to go up with me and take every chance with me—you could be just that sort of a good fellow. And even on the every-day, plain ground—why, dear—if you cared——"

Fanny was silent for a minute, and he could see that she was looking away from him, toward the boys on the grass, and the stage, and the torches.

"I want to go on doing this, while the war lasts," she said, "as long as I can hold out."

"Of course you do. And I want to go on with my job. We're both taking chances. I don't suppose a shot will get you—but—one might get me."

"It might get me, too. I'm going next to some of the hospitals, and they are shelled sometimes, aren't they?"

"Sure thing. And the funny thing is, I shouldn't want you not to go, any more than you'd want to keep me in safe places. Isn't that true?"

"Yes!" She whispered it.

"Then," he argued triumphantly, "doesn't that prove that we're fit mates? And if we just knew that we belonged to each other, wouldn't that—oh, don't mind my saying it that way—wouldn't that put a lot more *punch* into our work?"

"It might."

He well remembered that delicious little laugh of hers; it had never delighted him more than it did now.

"Not that yours needs any more punch," he went on, rather deliriously, in his joy. It certainly did give zest to a man's wooing to know that a few paces away were several hundred rivals in admiration of his choice. Not one of those fellows but would have given his eyes to be standing back here in the shadow with the girl of the scarlet feather! "Punch! I should say so. How you did put it over! And all the while I wanted to jump up and yell—'Keep your distance—she's *mine!*' "

"Oh—but you weren't as sure as that!" Fanny tried to withdraw her hand.

But Cary held it fast. "No, I wasn't sure, not by a darned sight. I'm not sure yet—except of one thing. And that's if you send me away to-night *not* sure I'll go to pieces with unhappiness and my work 'll run a fair chance of going to pieces too. Heaven knows when I'll see you again, with the scrap getting hotter all the time. I don't mean to play on the pathetic, but—well—you know as well as I do that this is war-time—and I'm green

with jealousy of every doughboy who'll see you from now on——"

He hardly knew what he was saying now. The violinist had begun to play again. The boys on the grass had fallen silent. The torches flared and fell and flared again in the light breeze which had suddenly sprung up. In a minute more he must go; he must run no risk of making the car-load of officers wait for him.

Fanny lifted her face and spoke to him in a whisper. "Cary, will you promise *me*—that you'll never—go back to the old—ways?"

"Oh, I'd *like* to promise you!" he whispered back eagerly. "I want to. That will make it surer than sure—if I can promise *you*. I do promise you—on my honour—and before—God."

They stood a moment in silence again, then Cary flung his arms around her and felt hers come about his neck.

"I want to promise you something, too," her voice breathed in his ear. "I'll never, never face an audience like this without—remembering that you might be in it. And I'll play—as you would like me to. Didn't I—tonight—without knowing?"

"Oh, my dear!" How could she have known, and given him what he wanted most? "Yes, you did—bless you! And I'll trust you, as you'll trust me. Oh, I didn't know how much I loved you, till you said that. Fanny—we were meant for each other—I know we were!"

Every man has said it, and Cary was as sure as they. Perhaps he was right—as right as they. Anyhow, as he went away, he was gloriously happy in the thought that though those hundreds on the grass might thrill with pleasure as the girl with the scarlet feather came out to sing them her farewell song, not one of them all could know

as he did, that behind the enchanting gayety beat a real heart, one that belonged only to a certain war correspondent, already many miles away! Surely, if she could trust him, he could trust her, and mutual trust, as all the world knows, is the essential basis for every human relation worth having. On this basis, then, was this new relation established; and the augury for the future was one on which to count with hope—even with confidence.

CHAPTER XX

A HAPPY WARRIOR

THE Field Hospital in which Jane was at work was now seeing its busiest days. A steady stream of wounded men poured into it, day and night, frequently augmented after a serious engagement at the Front by such a torrent of extra cases that every resource was heavily overtaxed. Surgeons and nurses worked to the limit and beyond it; they kept on long after they should have been released. In Jane's whole experience in this place no doctor or nurse ever gave up and was sent to the rear until actually forced to do so, by pure physical inability longer to continue. It was amazing how endurance held out, when the need was great, by sheer force of nerve and will. Yet the strain told, and it showed more and more in the worn faces of those upon whom the responsibility fell heaviest.

At a time when the situation was most trying, and the whole hospital force was exhausting itself with effort to cover the demand, a visitor appeared upon the scene who changed the face of things in an hour. He was a surgeon from a famous Base Hospital, himself distinguished both in America, from which he came, and in France, where he had been long serving far in advance of most of his countrymen. He had chosen to spend a brief leave from his work in visiting various Field Hospitals and Casualty Clearing Stations, and on account of his reputation for

remarkable success in his own branch of regional surgery his visits had been welcomed and made the most of by his colleagues in the profession.

Arriving at this particular Field Hospital he found its operating rooms choked with cases, its surgeons working in mad haste to give each man his chance for life, in spite of the rush; its nurses standing by to the point of exhaustion. Their forces had been depleted that very day by the sudden and tragic loss of their Chief, who at the conclusion of an incredible number of hours of unceasing labour at the operating table had dropped quietly at the feet of his assistants and been carried out, not to return. He was a man beyond middle age, a slender gray-haired hero of indomitable will, who had known well enough that he was drawing upon borrowed capital but had withheld none of it on that account. His removal from the head of his forces had had no outer effect upon them except to make them redouble their efforts to fill the gap; but not a man nor woman there who was not feeling the weaker for the loss.

It was at this hour that Doctor Leaver, looking in upon the shambles that the operating room had become, and recognizing the tremendous need, a need greater than he had left behind, took off his coat, put on the smeared gown in which Doctor Burnside had fallen at his post—there was not a clean one to be had in the depleted supply room—and went quietly to work. He waited for no authority from anywhere; he was needed for hurt and dying men, and there was no time to lose. Comparatively fresh because of his brief vacation from his own work, experienced beyond any of the men who had been the Chief's associates, he assumed the control as naturally as they gave it to him.

"By George! I never saw anything like this!" burst smotheredly from the lips of one of the younger surgeons, as he received certain supplies from Jane's hands. "Talk about rapid work!—Why, the man's lightning itself. He's speeded us all up, though we thought we were making a record before. If anybody'd told me this morning that before night I'd be fetching and carrying for Leaver of Baltimore, I'd have told him no such luck. Why, say—I thought I was tired! I'm fresh as a mule, as long as he stands there."

Doctor Leaver remained for five days, until a man to take the dead Chief's place could be found. During that period he stopped work only to snatch a few hours' rest when he could best be spared—if such intervals ever came. His tall, sinewy figure and lean, aquiline face became the most vitally inspiring sight in the whole place, the eyes of surgeons, nurses, and patients resting with confidence upon this skilful quiet man who did such marvellous things with such assured ease.

"Why," one nurse declared to Jane, as the two made ready trays of instruments just from the sterilizer, "it seems as if he had only to look at a case that's almost gone to have it revive. I've got so that I shall expect to see the dead sit up, pretty soon, if he tells them to. That red-headed boy over there—I wouldn't have said he had one chance in a million to recover from shock, two hours ago, when he came in. And now look at him—smiling at everybody who comes near him!"

"Yes, Doctor Leaver is wonderful," Jane agreed, "But remember who he is—one of the very most famous American surgeons we have over here. And modern surgery does do miracles—in the right hands. I never cease to wonder at it."

One nurse was like another to the busy chief surgeon, or so it seemed—they couldn't be sure that he would ever know any of them again if he saw them after this was over. But on the fourth day of his stay, as somebody called sharply—"Miss Ray!"—Jane noted that he looked suddenly over at her with that quick, penetrating glance of his which was keeping everybody on the jump. That same evening, during the first lull—or what might be called that—which had occurred for hours on end, he came to her.

"I have a message for you, Miss Ray," he said, "if you are the Miss Ray who comes from the same part of the States as a young man named Enos Dyer."

"Oh, yes, Doctor Leaver." Jane looked up eagerly.

"Come out here, please, where we can talk a minute," and the tall surgeon led her across the ward to an open door. He paused beside her in this doorway, drawing in deeply the cool damp air which poured in from outside, for the night like so many nights in France was wet. He passed his hand across his brow, smoothing back the dark, straight hair, moist with his unceasing labours.

"My word, but that feels good!" he said. "There are places in the world still, that don't smell of carbolic and ether." And he smiled at Jane, who smiled back. "How many hours' sleep have you had in the last forty-eight?" he questioned suddenly, eyeing understandingly the violet shadows beneath her eyes.

"As many as you—or more—Doctor Leaver," she answered lightly. "I've learned to do without, now—as you did, long ago."

"Nobody ever learns to do without. Get some tonight, please, without fail."

"You sound like a surgeon I know back home," she

said. She knew he would welcome a bit of relaxation from discipline during this brief interval of rest.

"Who? Red Pepper Burns?"

"Indeed, yes! How could you know?" she asked, though less surprised than she might have been if she had not already had many strange encounters, here in this land of strangers.

"He's the best friend I have in the world—as he is that of plenty of other people. If you know him, Miss Ray, you understand that my heart warms at the very mention of him."

She nodded. "You knew how he wanted to come over?"

"Yes! Hard luck. I wanted him badly with me. But he's represented over here, Miss Ray, in the best way a man can be, short of actual personal service. I learned from him a method of overcoming traumatic shock which is more effective than any I've found in use here. It's about our most difficult problem, you know. I scouted Burns' theory in the beginning, but I've had a great chance to try it out over here, and it certainly does save some pretty desperate cases. If I can ever get a minute to write I'll tell him a few things that will make him very happy."

"I am so glad," she said—and looked it.

"Now for my message. Back at Base I had a case that interested me mightily, not so much pathologically as psychologically. This boy Dyer was under my hands for a number of weeks—he's back at the Front now—and a more naïve, engaging youngster from the back country I never knew. He had us all interested in him, he was so crazy to be under fire again. You had him here, I believe, on his way out."

"Yes, Doctor. I shall always remember him."

"And he, you, evidently. A number of weeks ago he heard me say that I intended to take this trip, and he figured it out that I might meet you. So he sent you this message, with instructions to me to deliver it somehow or answer to him." He smiled over the recollection as he drew out a small paper. "Dyer could get away with more impudence—or what would be called that from anybody else—than any boy I ever saw. But it wasn't really that—it was his beautiful faith that everybody was on his side, including the Almighty. He had an unshakeable and touching belief that God would see him through everything and permit him to render some big service before he was through. And since he hadn't had his chance to do that yet, it followed as the night the day that he must get back to the Front and do it. I admit I came to feel much the same way about him myself. And when he gave me this message I understood that it must be delivered at any cost. So—without any cost at all—here it is."

Jane received the folded paper with a curious sense of its importance, though it came from the most obscure young private in the A. E. F. With a word of apology she opened it, feeling that Doctor Leaver would like to know something of its contents, if they were communicable. After a moment during which she struggled with and conquered a big lump in her throat, she handed it to him. He read it with a moved face, and gave it back with the comment:

"That's great—that's simply great! Thank you for letting me see."

The message was written in a cramped, boyishly uncertain hand, but there was nothing uncertain about the wording of it:

Miss Ray,

Dear Friend:

This is to tell you that it took longer than I expected to get me fixed up again but I am all O. K. now and never better and I am off for the place where things is doing. You know from what I said that I think there is something for me to do that nobody else could and I am going to do it if God lets me. Not that I think I am a Daniel but there sure is lions and just now they seem to be roaring pretty loud and I can't get there too soon. I want to ask you to pray for me not that I won't be afraid for I am not afraid but that I'll be let to do something worth coming over here for. The preacher Mr. Black said that God always hears if we have anything to say to Him and I think He would hear you speshally—because anybody would. This leaves me well and hoping you are the same.

Your friend,

Private Enos Dyer.

"I suppose you have no idea where he is now," Jane said, as she carefully put away the paper.

"Yes, I have an idea." The surgeon was looking off now into the night outside. Gusts of wind blew the rain into his face, but he seemed to welcome its refreshing touch. "I had a word with a young artilleryman just now on whom I operated yesterday for a smashed elbow joint. He doesn't mind that in the least, but the thing he does mind is that he's sure his 'buddy,' as he calls him, 'Enie Dyer,' was in that battalion of the ——nth Division that has just been wiped out. It had taken the objective it was sent for, and this boy has had to help shell the position where Dyer would have been if the battalion hadn't been sacrificed. His idea is that it was a perhaps inevitable sacrifice, but the thought that he might have been pouring lead and steel in on his friend, still alive and hiding in a shell-hole, has got on his nerves till he's all in pieces. He's a giant physically, but Dyer is twice his size, nevertheless."

"I'll find him," said Jane. She felt suddenly weak with dread. She had caught rumours before now of the battalion which had not been heard from and which seemed to have vanished from the earth, but she had no idea that any one in whom she was especially interested had been among that ill-fated number. She had known young Dyer but a few days, yet he had made upon her one of the most deeply disturbing impressions of her experience. His own personality, reinforced by her knowledge that he owed this simple trust of his to Robert Black, had combined to make the thought of him a poignant one. As she went back to her work she realized that Dyer was not to be out of her mind until the question of his whereabouts was settled—if it could be settled.

And meanwhile—what was it that he had bade her do for him?

It was three days later that the rumour reached the Hospital that the battalion which had been supposed to be wiped out had been heard from. Two runners had come through the enemy's lines, it was said, and had brought word that what was left of the four companies which formed the battalion was under constant barrage fire from the guns of its own side. The barrage had been stopped, rescue was on its way; the daring men who had brought the word would shortly be here to be fixed up—they had been completely exhausted when they arrived.

The artilleryman sat up in bed. He waved his good right arm and shouted, before anybody could restrain him:

"I'll bet Enie Dyer's one of 'em! I'll bet he's one of 'em! Darn his hide, he'd get through hell itself if he started to. He'd never know when he was beat—he never

did. He wouldn't know it if a seventy-five hit him—he'd tell it he had to be gettin' along where he was goin', and he'd pull it out and leave it layin' where 'twas! I vum——"

A burst of joyous laughter from all down the ward greeted this triumph of the imagination. Then Jane laid him gently down upon his back again—he had other injuries than the smashed elbow joint, and sitting up wouldn't do for him yet. In his ear she whispered, "I think it's Enie too, somehow. But we mustn't be too sure yet. Just try to wait quietly."

"Yes, ma'am." He owned her supremacy as they all did. But for the next twenty-four hours he hardly rested and never slept. Jane shared his vigil, while reports continued to arrive, some adding to their confidence, others taking it away. Finally, they knew that it was all true and the lost was found—what there was left of it.

And then came Enos Dyer, and the Polish boy who had been his companion. Five days without food before starting, eight hours on the trip, exhausted but game, they were brought back to the Field Hospital for the rest that was imperative, and the treatment of minor injuries. That night Jane sat beside Dyer's bed and listened to his account, because he was too happy to be suppressed until he had told her the outlines. She looked at his thin, exalted face, and saw the lines and hollows that hunger and fatigue had brought there, but saw still more clearly the triumph of spirit over body. She had managed that he should lie in a bed next his big friend, and between the reunited pair she felt like a happy warrior herself.

"Why, it was the *thing*, to start in the day time," insisted Enos, in reply to big Johnny's comment on the foolhardiness of this choice. "All the runners that tried

it before in the night got killed or wounded, and somebody'd got to try the thing a different way. I figgered out that in the day time when there ain't any scrap on, the enemy's always half asleep, they're so sure they can see everything that's goin' on. Nights everybody on both sides is keyed up like jack-rabbits, expectin' trouble. But day times—why they's nothin' to it—if they don't happen to see you."

Johnny chuckled: "No, *if* they don't!"

"You see," Enos went on, "we made things safe by leavin' behind our helmets and gas masks and rifles——"

"Leavin' 'em behind! Why, you'd need 'em."

"Not much we didn't. Tin hats hit on stones and ring out, when you're crawlin', and rifles and masks get in your way. One officer stopped us, though, and told us to go back and get 'em. I didn't want to, so I went back to the Major and told him so. He said, 'Don't you want 'em?' And I said, 'No, sir, we don't,' and he laughed and said, 'All right, go as you like.' He was the same that told me when I and Stanislaus asked to go that '*if* we got through we was to——' '*If* we get through——' I says to him—'we're *goin'* to get through! If God could take care of Daniel in that lions' den, I guess He can of us.' He looked at me a minute, and then he says; 'You'll make it.'" Enos laughed gleefully. "Nothin' like standin' up to an officer," he said, by way of throwing a side-light on the affair. Jane thought of Doctor Leaver, and wished he had not gone back to his Base Hospital, and could hear.

"Well, that's about all there was to it.—Gee, but this pillow does feel good under a fellow's head!—We crawled down the hill, and across the valley, and we crossed a road three times, right under them Fritzies' noses, and they never see us. Quite a lot of times I thought they

sure had seen us, and was comin' straight for us, but we laid low, and every time they'd turn off before they got to us, just as if——" his eyes met Jane's and looked straight into them—"a hand was holdin' back the lions. I knew then just as sure that we'd get through. We crossed three wire entanglements, and two German trenches, and we run right onto a sniper's post, only the sniper wasn't there—gone off for water or somethin', not thinkin' there was anythin' to snipe in broad daylight. About dark it begun to rain—and it got black as a pocket. We was soaked through. But we kep' a-comin', and quite awhile after dark we got near our own lines."

He paused and drew a long breath. Jane laid an exploring finger on his pulse, but it was not unduly excited or more weak than was safe. Johnny, propping himself upon his uninjured elbow, had to be made to lie down again.

"Gee!" muttered the artilleryman, "that was about the worst of all. They keep an awful lookout, our fellows do. Wonder they didn't shoot you."

"We thought of that," admitted Enos mildly, "so we decided to keep a talkin' as we come near, so they could hear we was English-speakin'. So we did. The outpost heard us and challenged us, and we told our story. They was bound to make sure we wasn't spies, so they kep' askin' us questions. By and by they called the corporal of the guard, and after he'd asked us forty-'leven more questions he took us back to Regimental Headquarters, and there was some officers there that I'd see before. I was surprised that they remembered me, but they did."—Jane was not surprised to hear this.—"And then, well, there wasn't anything too good for us. They had some chow heated up for us, and they told us we could

have the best there was to sleep on—and we did—only the best there was was the floor," he explained with a laugh. "This bed certainly feels good," he added.

That was his whole story of an exploit which had saved a battalion. Seven hundred men had gone forth to take the objective, two hundred and twenty-seven of them had been able to walk out, when the rescue came. The chances of a runner getting through the enemy lines by which the men were surrounded had been desperate ones, and Dyer had taken them and had come through without a hair of his head having been touched.

He turned to Jane, lowering his voice. "Did you ever get my letter I sent you?" he asked.

"Yes, Enos. Doctor Leaver brought it to me."

"I knew it," he said triumphantly. "I knew you was prayin' for me to get my chance, or I wouldn't have got it so easy."

Jane's eyes fell before his.

"You did do what I asked, didn't you?" he insisted, confidently.

She shook her head. "No, I didn't pray for that, Enos. All I could think of was that you might come through safely."

"And *that* was what you prayed for?"

She nodded.

"Why, *that* wasn't the big thing!" he cried, under his breath. "Except, of course—if us fellows didn't get through the rest of 'em wouldn't. Oh, yes, of course, that was what you did have to pray for, and I'm glad you did. It's wonderful how it works out, things like that!"

She stole away presently, forbidding either of the two friends to exchange any further talk that night. The

place was a little quieter to-night, though by to-morrow the wounded from the rescued battalion would be brought in and everything would speed up again. She went outside the hospital and found a sheltered corner where in the darkness she could be alone—until somebody should come by. The rain had stopped, the clouds had broken away; a myriad stars filled the sky.

After a time she took from her pocket her pen and a letter blank, and coming around where she could get a faint light from a window upon her paper slowly wrote these words, afterwards folding and sealing the letter and addressing it.

I know, at last, that you are right. I don't understand it yet—but I believe it. Somebody does hear—and it is possible to speak to Him. I have learned the way through a boy from the "hill" where we went that last Sunday afternoon. He says you taught him—and now he has taught me. You were right when you said that I would find it all around me here. I have, but it took this dear, wise boy to make it real to me—as you made it real to him. So—it has come through you after all, and I am very, very glad of that.

God keep you safe, Robert Black,—I pray for it on my knees.

JANE.

It was two days afterward that a despatch reached her from Dr. John Leaver, back at his Base Hospital, near Paris.

Operated to-day Chaplain Black ——nth Regiment ——nth Division, severe shrapnel wounds shoulder and thigh. Doing well.

LEAVER.

CHAPTER XXI

A PEAL OF BELLS

BY THE time that a certain note of a few lines, written outside a Field Hospital window in France, had reached a certain Base Hospital, many miles away, Robert Black was able to open his own mail, for a fortnight had gone by. He was so fortunate as to have two other letters in this mail, a happening which of itself would have made the rainy day much less dismal. But to find this particular handwriting upon the third envelope was enough to flood the ward with light—for him, though to some others, near him, who had had no letters, it remained a sombre place, as before.

He kept this third letter unopened till the morning dressings were over, the carts of surgical supplies had ceased to move through the ward, and the surgeons and nurses had left behind them patients soothed and made comfortable and ready for the late morning nap which followed naturally upon the pain and fatigue of the dressings. Then, when his neighbours in the beds on either side were no longer observant, Black drew out the single sheet, feeling an instant sense of disappointment that the lines were so few. Then—he read them, and his regret was changed in an instant to a joy so profound that he could only lie drawing deep breaths of emotion, as he stared out of a near-by window at tossing tree tops dripping with rain,

against the sky of lead. The sky for him, had opened, and let through a sea of glory.

Again and again, after a little, his eager eyes re-read the words, so few, yet so full of meaning. Among them certain lines stood out:

I know, at last, that you are right. I don't understand it yet—but I believe it. Somebody does hear—and it is possible to speak to Him—— You were right when you said that I would find it all around me here—— It took this dear, wise boy to make it real to me—as you made it real to him—— So—it has come through you, after all—— God keep you safe, Robert Black—I pray for it on my knees.

JANE.

It was well for him that this stimulus came when it did, for within twenty-four hours arrived another message of the sort which is not good for convalescents. Cary Ray sent a scrawl of a letter from some post upon the Front, which was three weeks in getting through, so that the news it contained was already old. Black read it, and then turned upon his pillow and hid his face in his arm. When his fellow patients saw that face again, though it was composed, and the Chaplain's manner was as they had known it all along, not a man but understood that he had had a heavy blow. By and by he asked for his writing tablet and pen, and they saw him slowly write a short letter. These were the words he wrote:

MY DEAR MR. AND MRS. LOCKHART:

I wish that this word I send you might be the first to reach you, that you might receive the news of your boy from the hand of a friend. But whether the official word comes first or not, you will be glad to have me tell you all I know—which comes to me through Cary Ray, and which he says has been absolutely verified.

Tom's division was one sent forward to replace the remnant of two British and French divisions which had been long in the field. The men went into position to hold the line under the hottest possible machine-gun fire. Tom's battalion lost all its officers except himself and a second lieutenant, and these two were forced to take command. They succeeded in holding the position for many hours and until relief came, thus saving the day in that sector, and causing the final retirement of the enemy. The second lieutenant, Fisher, himself severely wounded, told Cary Ray that "Lockhart was a regular bull-dog for hanging on, nothing could make him turn back. His men would go anywhere he told them to, for he always went with them—and went first." When he fell it was under a rain of gun-fire, and there could not have been an instant's survival.

Though you have prayed many prayers for your boy, and they have been answered differently from the way in which you would have had them, I believe your faith in God is no less than before. When Tom and his father meet again, some day, and talk it over, it will all be clear to that father why his boy went home ahead of him. But Tom knows—*now;* I'm very sure of that.

So, dear friends, you have a glorious memory to comfort you. The gold star you will wear will be the highest honour that can come to you. Nothing that Tom could have accomplished in a long life of effort could so crown that life with imperishable beauty, or so make it immortal. I rejoice with you, for the lad was my dear friend, and I can never forget him.

Faithfully yours,
ROBERT BLACK.

Late that night, when all was quiet in the ward, he wrote this same news to Jane. But at the end of his letter came other words, of such joy and thanksgiving as a man can write only when his heart is very full.

What you tell me of yourself goes to my deepest heart, as you must well know. I knew it would come—it had to come. What it means to me I can tell you only when I see you, face to face. The thought of that hour shakes me through and through.

On the 11th of November, at half after ten in the morning, Jane was in one of the larger towns which had been swept by devastating fires at one time or another throughout the entire period of the war. She had been sent with a certain Brigadier General who had been under her care at the Field Hospital, and who had obtained for her a short leave that she might accompany him and see for herself something of this famous region. At the time of their arrival shells had again unexpectedly begun pouring in upon the town, though the rumour of the coming armistice was persistent, and even the hour was given.

"I can't let you go any nearer," General Lewiston said to Jane, as his car approached the town, and halted at his order, "much as I want you to be there when the guns cease firing. They're evidently going to keep it as hot here as they know how, up to the very last minute."

"Oh, but you must let me stay," Jane begged. "I'm not in the least afraid, and I'd give all I possess to be exactly there, when the hour comes."

"I'll leave you here, in care of Lieutenant Ferguson, and send back for you when it's over," the General offered.

"Please, take me in with you. I've been under fire, before. We were bombed three times in hospital, you know."

"Yes, but this is different, Miss Ray. I'm responsible for you now."

"Not a bit, General. It's my responsibility, if I ask it—as I do."

He couldn't resist her, or that sweet sturdiness of hers which made her seem unlike the women for whom a man had to be "responsible." So he bade his chauffeur drive on. Thus it came about that Jane had her wish and was actually in this most noteworthy of French towns when,

at the close of that last hour of roaring guns and bursting shells, it all came to an end, as one graphic account put it, "as though God Himself had dropped a wet blanket over the crackling flames of hell."

So, after that first breathless stillness which succeeded upon the din, Jane heard that which she could never afterward forget—nor could any other who heard it. From the high tower which had come through scatheless above the otherwise ruined cathedral, rang out a great peal of bells. The cathedral doors were opened, and hundreds of soldiers surged in. Jane saw them go, and called General Lewiston's attention.

"Mayn't we follow?" she urged, and the officer nodded. They got out of the car and crossed the space and went in at the great battered doors in the roofless walls which still stood to protect the sacred enclosure. As they went in they heard the notes of "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," break from a young tenor in the very centre of the crowd, and heard it taken up and grow and swell till it seemed to lift above the broken walls to the very sky. And then they saw the wonderful thing which followed. If, before this hour, Jane by her own experience had not been brought to her knees, surely she must have fallen upon them now—as she did, with the General beside her on one side and the Lieutenant on the other, both with bared heads. For all those men before her, British and French and Mohammedan and Jew, had now dropped to their knees, and led by an unknown man with a Red Triangle on his sleeve who had lifted his arms to them as a signal were devoutly saying together the words of the Lord's Prayer. Such a deep, whole-hearted sound it was which came from all those brawny throats as Jane had never heard before.

She had heard men cheer—she had heard them sing—she had never heard men pray together, regardless of sect or creed, as she heard them now. And suddenly she realized what she had never understood before, that it is not one man here or there who believes that it is of use to say "Our Father," but that it is the great, all but universal cry from every heart in time of stress. The armistice was signed, the guns had ceased—it was the first deep instinct of these men of every creed to speak their gratitude to high Heaven.

There was singing again then—glorious singing of national anthems, British and French and American. Jane's voice joined the General's and the Lieutenant's and the three looked at one another. The General's eyes were wet, and the Lieutenant's lips were trembling, while Jane frankly wiped the streaming tears away as she smiled into the two faces, which smiled understandingly back. And presently they were out and away again, and the General was saying to Jane, "I'm glad you had your way, Miss Ray, since you didn't get hurt, for you've seen to-day what must almost have paid you for all you have spent since you came over."

"I'm paid a thousand times," she answered, and so she felt about it.

Things happened rapidly now. There was plenty of work still for the hospitals, but it was of a different sort. No longer did the ambulances bring to Jane the freshly wounded. She was sent back to a Base Hospital, where were the cases which needed long care before they could be discharged. She had had more than one letter from Robert Black urging her to keep in close touch with him, before the one came which said that he was soon to be sent home. He asked if it would be possible for her to get

leave and come to London, where the final days of his convalescence were to be spent. He was walking about now, he said, and—what it would be to walk down certain streets with her! He added other statements calculated to have their effect upon her, if only to make her understand how very much he wanted to see her.

It was not easy to bring about, but at length she obtained a four days' leave, and through the influence of Doctor Leaver secured the difficult permission to cross the Channel on one of the crowded boats. An early December night saw her making the crossing, the wind and spray stinging her face into brilliant colour, her big coat-collar turned well up about her throat, her eyes set straight ahead toward the English coast. It was almost sixteen months since she had left England on her way to France—sixteen months of the hardest work she had ever dreamed of doing—and the happiest. Not one hard hour would she take back—not one!

Dover, and many delayed hours to London, with post-war conditions, crowded trains, upset schedules—and always the wounded and crippled everywhere, that she might not for a minute forget. Then, at last, Charing Cross Station, and the lights of the great city, no longer obscured because of enemy air-raids. As Jane came out upon the street she drew a deep breath of content. She had been several times in London, and knew her way about. It was not far to the house where she was expected, but she had not been met because it had been impossible to know beforehand just when she might get in. The days of making careful consultation of railway schedules and then wiring an expectant friend the hour and minute of one's intended arrival were long gone by—and had not yet come again.

She was keyed to a high pitch of expectation during every moment of that walk. She was so near now—so near! She was actually in the same great city. It was almost unbelievable, but it was true. There was a chance—it couldn't be more than the millionth part of one, but it was a chance—that at any moment she might turn a corner and see coming toward her the tall figure which she had last seen a year ago in August. How would he look? What would he say? Would he be—different? Oh, he must be different! He couldn't have been through it all and not have suffered some change. But—she knew as well as she knew anything in the world that in the way that mattered most to her he would not be different, he would be absolutely the same. As for herself, was she not different too? And was she not—absolutely the same? Oh, no—oh, no! With the development of her experience and the growth of her sacrifice had not the thing within her heart and spirit which was his become a thousand times more his? No doubt of that. Then—might not that which he had for her have been augmented too? The thought was one she had to put away from her. Enough, if he could but give her so much of his heart as he had given before. That of itself, she thought, would be all that she could bear—today.

The old green door with the shining brass knocker she so well remembered came into view as she turned into the quaint little street not far from Westminster Abbey where lived her English friend. On the first of her visits to England, in search of rare objects for her shop, she had met Miss Stoughton, an Englishwoman in the late thirties, who had an established reputation as a connoisseur and collector of rare antiques. Business dealings with

this woman had resulted in a permanent friendship between the two. Miss Stoughton was separated from her family, all of whom were strongly opposed to her independent establishment in business, a departure from all the family traditions of birth and education. She had chosen nevertheless to live her own life, and when the Great War came to England she had a well developed business experience to back her in giving her services to her country. At the moment when Jane came to her she had just returned to the little house, after a long period of absence.

The green door opened at the first fall of the knocker, and the tall Englishwoman herself welcomed Jane with hearty hospitality.

"My dear—this is most awfully jolly—to see you again! How well you are looking! A trifle thin, perhaps—and no wonder—but such a fine colour! Come in—come in! The house is still a bit upset, you know, but you won't mind that."

"It doesn't look upset," Jane commented, after one glance about the little drawing room, where a bright fire burned on the diminutive hearth, and a tea-table beside it offered refreshment, as if it had been waiting for the guest. "It looks just as I remember it—the prettiest room I ever saw in England."

"Oh, my dear Jane—you are the same extravagant admirer of my simple things. But I always appreciated your praise of them, for you are not only a connoisseur but an artist. And you have put aside all that to do this nursing! Do sit down and tell me all about it, while we have tea. But first——" she interrupted herself with a gesture—"let me not fail to give my message—a most important message. Morning, noon, and night for three

days now, have I been besieged by a tall Scotsman in uniform with the cross of a regimental chaplain. He had what I may call a determined chin, and the finest pair of black eyes I ever saw. It seems he also is expecting you, but he fears you may in some way find it difficult to reach him, or may lose an instant of time in doing so. He is likely to receive orders to sail for the States at any time; and I gather from his quite evident anxiety that if he should be forced to leave without having seen Miss Ray it would be to him a calamity."

"It would be one to me too," Jane answered, with a rising colour but a steady meeting of her friend's quizzical look. "How, please, can I let him know?"

"A messenger waits within call," Miss Stoughton assured her, gaily. "Our war-time telephone service is still frightfully crippled, so we provide ourselves with substitutes. A small boy is ready to run post-haste through the streets of London to carry the news of your arrival to" —she picked up a card lying upon a priceless small table of an unbelievable antiquity of which Jane had long envied her the possession, and read the name with distinctness—"'*Mr. Robert McPherson Black.*' A very good name, my dear, and one which well fits the man. I should judge he is accustomed to have his own way in most things, at the same time that an undoubted spirit of kindness looks out of that somewhat worn face of his. I will despatch the messenger at once. Shall we make an appointment for the evening, or are you prepared to see your friend within the hour? He will most certainly return with the boy who goes for him—if he is not already on his way, on the chance of finding you."

Jane came close to her hostess, and laid her hands upon her shoulders. "Dear Miss Stoughton," she said, "I'm

sure you understand. If military orders weren't such startling things and likely to arrive sooner than one expects them, I would put Mr. Black off until evening and just have the visit with you I so much want. But——"

"I do perfectly well understand," replied Miss Stoughton, decidedly, "and I should be most awfully cross with you if you put off that very fine man an hour longer than necessary. He has two service chevrons and two wound stripes on his arm, and he walks with a cane; I should not be in the least surprised if within his blouse he wears concealed some sort of decoration. In any case he deserves every consideration. A chaplain with wounds has done something besides read the prayer book to his men behind the lines."

She left the room and sent off her messenger. Returning she led Jane up the short staircase to the tiniest and most attractive of English guest rooms.

"You see, though I am not married nor intend to be," she said, with the smile which made her somewhat plain but noteworthy face charming to her guest, "I can quite understand that you would like a look in the mirror before the Chaplain arrives. You have always reminded me of some smooth-winged bird, but the smoothest winged of birds will preen itself a good bit, and you shall do the same. Then come down, and we'll be having tea when the knocker claps. After that—I have an engagement at my work-rooms—oh, yes, indeed I have! There is still much to be done for our soldiers and yours, you know."

Jane would have been more—or less—than woman if she had not welcomed the chance to remove all possible traces of her journey before the sounding of that knocker. She made haste, but none too much, for Miss Stoughton's predictions were truer than could have been expected of

one who must walk with a cane. As the last hairpin slipped into place the knocker fell, and Jane caught one quick breath before she ran to complete the freshening of every feather in those "smooth wings" of hers.

"He's here, Jane dear," Miss Stoughton presently announced, as she followed her knock into the little guest room. "I don't consider myself at all susceptible to bachelor attractions, but I will admit that I like this man's face and his nice manner—and—quite everything about him. I'm going to slip out now, and let you come down to find him alone."

"Oh, please stay and have tea with us first, Miss Stoughton—please do!"

"I am convinced of your sincerity and truthfulness," replied Miss Stoughton, "in all ordinary matters. I should not hesitate to buy from you any rare curio in the world on your word of honour alone that it was authentic. But when you urge me to stay by my fireside and have tea with you and a Scottish-American chaplain whom you have not seen for considerably more than a year, I have my doubts, my dear, of your good faith. I'll see that the kettle is boiling for you, and you, as you Americans say, must 'do the rest.'"

Jane laughed, her eyes glowing. "Oh, you're such a friend," she whispered. "But please don't stay away long. I want you to know Mr. Black—indeed I do. And I'm so happy to have your home to meet him in."

"My home is yours—and his—while you stay." And Miss Stoughton went away, beaming with kindness—and experiencing a touch of envy. What must it be, she thought, to look as Jane was looking—so fresh and lovely in spite of her years of business life and these months of

work and heavy care—and then go down to meet the eyes of such a man as this who waited below for her? Miss Stoughton walked very fast as she went through the crowded streets; it was best to hurry to her work, and not to think too long on what might be taking place in that little drawing room of hers.

Jane came down so quietly that Robert Black would not have heard her if he had not been on the watch. When she caught sight of him he was standing waiting for her, leaning upon the stout cane without which he could not yet wholly support himself. Her heart, at sight of the thin yet strong and undaunted look of his face, the whole soldierly pose of him in his uniform, gave one quick throb of mingled joy and pain, and then went on beating wildly. It couldn't be real—it couldn't—that after all both had been through they had met again—that they were both here, in this little London drawing room. Yet it *was* real—oh, thank God, it *was* real!

It was dark outside, but lamplight and firelight shone on both faces as the two pairs of eyes looked into each other.

"It *is* you," said Robert Black, after a moment, while he still held Jane's hand. "I can't quite believe it—but it *is* you. Will you mind if I look at you very hard, for a little, to make myself sure?"

"I'm not so sure it is you," Jane said. She couldn't quite return that eager gaze, but she could take stock of his appearance, none the less, as a woman may. "You must have been through very, very much."

"Not more than you. You are not changed at all, in one way; but in another way—you are. It is the change that I expected, but—it takes hold of me, just the same. You have seen—what you have seen."

"Yes. And you have done—what you have done," she answered.

"We have very much to tell each other, haven't we? And so little time, at the longest, to tell it in—till we meet back home. I'm sorry to be going first, again, but I have no choice. I wanted to wait for my regiment, but—I suspect Red's friend Doctor Leaver of having a hand in these rigid orders to get out of the country."

"Aren't the wounds doing well?" she asked him, with the nurse's straightforwardness which was so natural to her now.

"The wounds are all right, but they left a bit of trouble behind. It's nothing—only a matter of time. The sea voyage alone will undoubtedly work wonders. Have you any idea when you will be coming?"

"Within a month or two, I imagine."

"Really?" His eyes lighted. "But—Jane—I can't wait even till then to hear all that you can tell me of yourself."

"Come and sit down. And—may I give you tea?"

She laughed as she said it, and he laughed with her, a note of sheer joy at the absurdity of stopping to drink tea, when the time was so short.

"Miss Stoughton will expect us to take it," he admitted. "It's unthinkable that we shouldn't bother about it. Can't we pour it away somewhere, where it will do no harm? On the fire?"

"And risk putting it out? I can never remember how small an English fireplace is, in a house of this size, till I see one again. Really, I don't think it would do you any hurt to take the tea. You're not wholly strong yet." And she quickly made and poured it.

"Anything to get it over," he agreed, and took the cup from her hand, drank, and set it down. "Now!" he said,

and sat down beside her. "Jane, I can't believe it, yet. I've been haunting Charing Cross Station for days. I wanted to see you get off the train. I wanted to see you before you saw me, so I could look—and look—and look at you. It's been so long to wait. . . . Well!" He quite evidently laid sudden and firm restraint on his own emotions—he didn't mean to let himself get out of hand. "Tell me all about it. You can't know how I want to hear."

"What will you have first?"

"Begin at the beginning. Tell me—everything you must know I want to know about you. How it began—what came first—and what followed. And—most of all—where you are now."

They never knew how the hours passed—three hours—while they sat before the fire in the little London drawing room and lived again the year and more that had separated them. But when at last Robert Black, looking in amazement at the watch upon his wrist, rose to go, he was in possession of that knowledge of Jane's experience which had transformed him from a convalescent to a well man—or so it seemed.

He took both her hands in his, and stood looking down at her.

"I'm very certain that my ship doesn't sail before Monday," he said, "or I shouldn't take the chance I am taking. Jane—I haven't said a word of what is nearest my heart. I have a strange fancy that I want to say that word—to-morrow. Do you remember that to-morrow is——"

"Sunday. Indeed I do remember it. I have thought, ever since I knew that I was coming, that if I could just—be in London on a Sunday—with you——"

His smile was like sunshine. "We'll go to a service together. Will you trust me to choose the place?"

"I want you to."

"I'll come for you in the morning," he said. Then he lifted first one of her hands to his lips and then the other, said, "Good night!" and was gone, with a military sort of abruptness that was rather an emphasis of his former self than a change from it.

It was easy to know what he had to say to her, that he had chosen to defer until the following day. It had been in all his manner to her; there was no need that he should tell her it was coming; it was a most characteristic postponement and a highly significant one. Why, since he could choose it, should he not select the great Day of the week on which to say the words which he was not less eager to speak than she to hear? That he should do so could but show her how sacred an event it was to him, nor fail to make it quite as sacred to her.

CHAPTER XXII

IN HIS NAME

MORNING, and the London streets, with Westminster lifting its stately heights above them. Jane had been quite sure that Black meant to take her there; somehow there seemed no place where they could so much want to go. Miss Stoughton had told her that all through the war the great Abbey, like St. Paul's, had been thronged with the people who had gone, on week days as on the Sabbath, to pray, as the new war-time phrasing had it, "for those serving upon land and sea and in the air." And now, early as they had left the little house almost under the Abbey's shadow, they found the streets filled with those who like themselves were pressing toward the place where since the eleventh of November the nation's gratitude for victory was being voiced in each prayer and song which rose from those sombre walls.

So presently Jane found herself kneeling beside her companion, in this place of places which stood for the very heart of England. More than once on former visits to London she had entered at those doors, but then it had been only as a sightseer. Now, it was as a worshipper that she had come. Everything in her life was changed, since those former visits, and she herself was more changed than all.

It was in the midst of a great prayer, one not read from the printed page but proceeding straight from the heart of

one of Westminster's best-loved administrants, that Jane felt a hand come upon hers. Fingers touched the fastening of her glove, making known a wish. She drew off the glove, and the bare hands clasped and so remained throughout the whole period of kneeling through this and other prayers. Strangers were all about, pressed close in the rows of straight-backed chairs which were set even more thickly this day than there had ever been need before, yet Jane Ray and Robert Black were almost as much alone in the midst of the throng as they could have been anywhere. It seemed to Jane, as that warm, firm hand held hers, that life flowed to her from it, so vital was the sense of union. Though not a word had as yet been said, the touch of this man's hand seemed all but to speak aloud to her of the love that was only waiting the hour for its expression. The promise of that clasp was to her only a shade less binding than the word that he should afterward speak.

When the service had ended and they were upon the street again, Black did not lead her home. Instead he took her slowly about and about the place until the crowds had left it. Then he said, with a gesture toward the nave:

"Shall we go back? There will still be people about, but there's room for all. I know a corner where I'm sure we can be quite alone. Somehow, Jane—I want it to be there. Don't you?"

She looked up, met such a glance as told her that the hour had come, and bent her head in assent.

"Church walls never meant so much to me as now," he said, very low, as they entered, "now, when the Church has come into her own as never before. What does it mean when the people crowd like that into her doors? What did it mean when all those soldiers, as you told me,

crowded into that war-ruined cathedral? Why, it must mean that the instinct to go where the Name of God is most deeply associated with every stone and window is something which is in every man who has ever heard song and prayer ascend from such a place. He can't do without it—he can't do without it. . . . And no more can we —*now.*"

He said no more, while he led her down the great nave, nearly deserted. People lingered here and there in famous corners, beside distinguished name on statue or tablet, but as Black had said, there was room for all in that vast space. And presently they had come to a spot behind a stone column where they were in sight of none, and all were far away. Black took Jane's hand in his again, and himself drew off the glove.

"Jane," he said, with that in his low tone which spoke his feeling, "it seemed to me that I must have our first prayer together in this place. I came to Westminster and this very spot, when our regiment was in London, more than a year ago. I knelt here, all alone, and asked God, as I had never asked before, that He would make Himself real to you. He has done it, as you have told me, and I wanted to bring you here and thank Him, on my knees. Because now, we can work together—all the rest of our lives—in His Name. Is it so—Jane?"

She could not look up. Great sobbing breaths caught her unawares and shook her from head to foot. She felt his arm come about her, felt his hand press her face against his shoulder, and there, for a few minutes, she cried her heart out. He held her silently, and with such a tender strength that it seemed to her that she had come into some wonderful refuge, such as she had never dreamed of. All the tension, all the weariness, all the heart-wrenching

sights and sounds of the last year, had come back to her in one overwhelming flood at his words, as they had come many times before. But never, at such times, could she let go; always she had had to hold fast to her courage and her will, lest giving way weaken her for the pressing, unremitting tasks yet to be done. In the old, ruined cathedral a month before, she had had all she could do to keep control and not suffer a very hysteria of reaction, such as, alone among those hundreds of men, would have done both herself and them a harm. But now—she knew for the first time in her independent, resourceful life, what it might mean to lean upon an arm stronger than her own, and to feel, as she was momently feeling more sustainingly, that another life was tied so closely to her own that neither sorrow nor joy could ever shake her again that it should not shake that life too.

By and by the storm passed. No longer did she want to weep—a great peace came upon her. She stood still within the right arm which held her—the uninjured arm—she didn't know that he could not lift that left arm yet nor use it beyond slight effort. Now, at last, he spoke.

"Will you kneel with me, here? No one will see—and if they did—everyone prays now."

So they knelt, and Robert Black poured out his heart in a few low-spoken words which, if she had still been unbelieving that they could be heard, must have stirred her to the depths. As it was, convinced past all power of sceptic argument to shake, Jane's own soul spoke with his to the God who had brought her where she was.

With the last words his hand came again upon her cheek and turned her face gently toward his. His lips sealed his betrothal to her with a reverent passion of pledging which told her, more plainly than any words could have

done, that that life of his was now fully hers. It was the life of no pale saint, she well knew, but that of a man whose blood was red and swift-flowing, whose pulses beat as fast and humanly as her own. But he had chosen to devote that virile life to service in the Church, with the same ardour with which, during these months just past, he had given of his best to help defeat the enemies of that Church and all for which it stands. No fear for her now that service with him back on the old home grounds would be dull or tame or weak; it would call for the best she had to give. And she would give it, oh, but she would give it! She knew, at last, that no task of his in that service could seem to her uncongenial, if to him it was worth while.

As they walked slowly back up the long, quiet nave, it was as from some high rite. At the door Robert Black turned and looked back into the dim distance of the great vaulted interior. Then he looked down into Jane's face.

"It's done," he said, with a smile which lighted his eyes into altars upon which burned holy fires of love and joy, "and never can be undone. And when you're home again—oh, please promise me—we'll have—the rest of it —without any delay at all?"

"I promise." The smile she gave him back, he thought, was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

At the door of the little house under the shadow of the great Abbey, Miss Stoughton met them with a message, sent in haste from Dr. John Leaver, forwarding Black's orders to sail that night.

"But if," he said, standing with Jane at the last moment, alone with her in the small drawing room, "by any strange happening this should be all that we ever had of each other in this life, we have had—it all! Jane, we have had it all—all the best of it!"

"Yes!" she breathed it. "But"—she lifted her face and whispered it—"I want—a life-time to say that in!"

"So do I—bless you!—and we shall have it—somehow I'm very sure. God keep you safe, my Best Beloved, I know He will!"

Then he went away, limping a very little with his cane, but walking very erect and looking as if he had won all the wars of all the worlds. He could hardly have been so happy if he had.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TOWN WAS EMPTY BEFORE

OF *course* I'm going down to New York to see him in!" shouted Dr. Redfield Pepper Burns. He waved a cable message in his good right hand. "What did I wire Leaver to wire me the date for, if not so I could be on the pier yelling when that darn chaplain of the ——nth gets in? Why, if Cary Ray's word is to be trusted, Black's come through hell, same as the rest of 'em. Be there? You *bet* I'll be there."

He was there. Nothing could have stopped him. He wanted to see instantly for himself that those shoulder and thigh injuries of which Leaver had written were not going to leave any serious or permanent results. Besides—oh, yes, he wanted to see the man himself, his friend,—who had faced death for him, as every soldier who went had faced it, for those who were left behind. He wanted to see Robert McPherson Black, and look into those keen, dark eyes of his, and see break over the well-remembered clean-cut face that smile which Red knew the first wave of his arm would bring.

People on that pier had to make way when a certain chaplain came down the gangway. A big man with a red head politely but irresistibly put them aside from his path, and they saw him grasp the chaplain's hand. They didn't hear much, but they saw that two friends had met.

The very silence of that first instant told the story of a glad reunion.

Later, the words came fast enough. When Red could get Black to himself his first questions were pointedly professional. Satisfied upon the items he had wished made clear, he turned his attention to making his welcome manifest.

"I don't want you to think I've lost my head," he said, in the taxicab which was taking the two men to their train. Black was on furlough; the way had been made clear for him to go at once, though he was to rejoin his regiment when it came home later, pending his and his men's discharge. "But I'm just so plain glad to have you back I've got to say it, and say it out loud. I knew well enough when you went you wouldn't play safe, over there —and you haven't."

"Just how much use," inquired Black, looking him straight in the eye, "would you have had for me if I had?"

"Not much."

"Well, then——"

The two laughed, as men do when there is real emotion behind the laughter. Red let his welcome go at that for the present, and plunged into talk about the armistice and the present condition of things. But late that night, when Black having reached the haven of Red's home, after a quick journey by the fastest train over the shortest route, was sent to his room at what Red considered a proper hour—midnight—he had wanted to sit up until morning, but he considered Black still a convalescent, and now in his charge—Red gave his friend his real welcome. To this day Black preserves a scrawl upon a certain professional prescription blank, which was pushed under his door that night just before he switched off his light.

All the evening he had been made to feel how they all cared. Mrs. Burns had given him the most satisfying of greetings; the Macauleys had rushed in to see him; Samuel Lockhart had called him upon the telephone to make an appointment for the morning. His whole parish would have been in to wring his hand if Red had not kept his actual arrival a secret for that night except to these chosen few. But nothing that anybody said or did gave him half the joy that he found in those few words written slantwise across the little white slip with R. P. Burns' name and address printed at the top and no signature at all at the bottom. Considering that day, now almost three years back, when Robert Black had first looked across the space between pulpit and pew and coveted the red-headed doctor for his friend, and taking into account all the difficulties he had found in getting past the barriers Red had set up against him, it was not strange that his heart gave one big, glad throb of exultation as he read these words:—

"The town was empty before—it's full now, though not another blamed beggar comes into it to-night."

Two months later Jane came home, to find Cary there before her, with Fanny as his bride. They had been married in Paris, "with all the thrills," as Cary said, beaming proudly upon the slender figure in the French frock beside him, as he described the wedding to his sister. A few days later Robert Black and Jane Ray themselves were quietly married at the home of Dr. Redfield Pepper Burns and went at once to the manse, which had been made ready for them by the united efforts of Mrs. Burns, Miss Lockhart and Mrs. Hodder, Black's former housekeeper.

At the wedding breakfast, Cary, self-appointed master of

ceremonies, rose in his place. He looked around at the little company, his eyes resting first on one and then another, till he had swept the circle. Then he made a speech, which he always afterward asserted to be his masterpiece in the way of rhetorical effort, struck off, as it was, on the inspiration of the hour.

Getting up in the correspondent's uniform which it had pleased him to put on once more for the occasion, since Black, as yet undischarged, was obliged still to wear the olive-drab with the cross upon the collar, Cary began:—

"In view of the fact that the bridegroom is still in O. D., it seems to me that it ought to be known to you people what it looks as if he never meant to tell you for himself. It's only by chance that I found it out, but, by George! I'm going to tell you, since he won't."

He walked around to Black, and laid hand upon the topmost button of his new brother-in-law's tunic. Black put up a hand and attempted to restrain him, but it could not be done, without a fight. He therefore submitted, the colour rising in his cheek, while Cary unfastened the tunic and threw back its left side, whereupon a certain famous war medal for distinguished service became visible.

"My faith!" burst from Red's lips. "I knew it! But I never dared ask."

"The wearer of this," Cary went on, while Black's eyes fell before the glow of joy he had caught in Jane's, "went over the top with his men every blooming time they went, till Fritz finally got him. But before the shrapnel that put him out at last left the guns he had brought in wounded under every sort of hot fire, had taken every chance there was, and that last day—turned the trick that brought him this,——" and Cary laid a reverent hand upon the medal. "It happened this way——"

"No—please!——" began Black quickly, turning in protest. "Not now—nor here——"

But Cary wouldn't be restrained. "Now—and here, by your leave, Bob, or without it. I won't go into details, if you don't like me to, but I will say this much: The story concerns a machine gun on our side which had lost its last gunner, trying to put out a machine-gun nest of the enemy's which was enfilading our men and mowing them down. This Bob Black of ours comes up, jumps in, and keeps things going all by himself till—the spit-fire over there was silenced. It may not have been the proper deed for the chaplain—I don't know—but I do know that he saved ten times more lives than he took—and I say—here's to him—and God bless him!"

The toast to which all had risen was drunk in a quivering silence, with Jane's hand upon her husband's shoulder, and her proud and beautiful eyes meeting his with a glance which said it all.

Then Black rose. "Sometime, Cary," he said, with a glance, "I'll be even with you for this. Sometime I shall have found out all the chances *you* took, and I'll recite them on some public occasion and make you wince as you never winced under shot and shell. But while we are drinking toasts—in this crystal clear water of our wedding feast which is better than any wine for such an hour—I want to propose one which is very near my heart. Not all the war medals that ever were struck would be big enough or fine enough to pin upon some of the breasts that most deserved them. One man I know, who desperately wanted to go across and take his part in the salvaging of life from the wreck, but couldn't go, nevertheless contributed one of the most efficient means to saving life that has been used by some of the best surgeons there.

And I want to say—'here and now'—as Cary says—that I consider it took more gallantry on the part of this same red-headed—and red-blooded—fellow to stay here and carry on, as he did, with speeches and loan-raising, and all the rest of the unthanked tasks that he put through at heavy cost to his own endurance, than to have gone across, as he longed to do, and won medals by spectacular work that would have made his name famous on both sides of the water. So here's to Dr. Redfield Pepper Burns, bearer of a heavier cross than I have ever borne,—and winner of one more shining. And I, too, say—God bless him!"

They looked into each others' eyes, these two, across the table, and Red's eyes fell before the light that was in Black's. It was not only the light that his wedding day had brought there, it was the light of a friendship which should last throughout these two men's lives, and bless both, all the way.

THE END

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